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HEADLINE
05/05 China economy going backwards

SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/05/economy/china-economy-services-decline-covid-intl-hnk/index.html
GIST	<p>Hong Kong (CNN Business)China's gigantic services sector just contracted at the second sharpest pace on record as Covid lockdowns hit businesses hard.</p> <p>The Caixin purchasing managers' index, a closely-watched indicator for assessing the state of the economy, plummeted to 36.2 in April from 42 in March, according to a survey released by IHS Markit on Thursday. A reading below 50 indicates contraction, while anything above that gauge shows expansion.</p> <p>The services sector accounts for more than half of the nation's GDP and over 40% of its employment. And with survey data showing China's manufacturing sector also shrinking last month, the world's second biggest economy went backwards in April.</p> <p>While conditions might improve this month as Covid infections rates ease and officials try to limit the damage to the economy, large parts of Beijing have just been placed under tighter restrictions and some economists are now forecasting that Chinese GDP will decline in the second quarter.</p> <p>The nation's capital has effectively shut down its largest district, Chaoyang, suspending transportation within it and encouraging 3.5 million residents to work from home as part of its latest effort to curb Covid-19 cases, local authorities announced Wednesday.</p> <p>The nearly 6-point decline in services activity in April was second only to the collapse in February 2020, when China's economy came to a near standstill as it battled to contain the initial coronavirus outbreak that started from Wuhan. In that month, the Caixin services PMI dived to 26.5 from 51.8 in January.</p> <p>Businesses in the world's second largest economy were already grappling with rising energy and raw material costs, when Covid lockdowns hamstrung their operations further.</p> <p>It has also become harder for firms to pass the higher prices to consumers, because of the impact Covid restrictions have having on customer demand. That has translated to even lower employment.</p> <p>"Some companies, affected by the drop in orders, laid off workers to lower costs," Wang said. The measure for employment in the services sector has been under 50 for four consecutive months, the survey showed.</p> <p>The data came just hours after China reported a steep drop in tourist spending for the Labor Day national holiday.</p> <p>Tourist spending was only 64.7 billion yuan (\$9.8 billion) over the five-day holiday, down 43% from the same period last year, according to a statement by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism late Wednesday.</p> <p>People made 160 million domestic tourist trips during the holiday, down 30% from a year earlier.</p> <p>The data again highlights how China's zero-Covid policy has taken a heavy toll on its economy.</p> <p>On Saturday, PMI surveys from the government indicated that both factory and non-manufacturing activities slumped in April to their worst levels since February 2020.</p> <p>"Recent mobility trends suggest that China's growth momentum deteriorated significantly in April," analysts from Fitch Ratings wrote on Tuesday. They expect GDP to contract in the second quarter, before output recovers in the second half.</p> <p>Nomura analysts also warned last month of a rising risk of "recession" in the second quarter, as lockdowns, a shrinking property sector, and slowing exports hit the economy hard.</p> <p>As the highly transmissible Omicron variant spreads quickly in China, the country is battling its worst outbreak in more than two years. So far, at least 27 Chinese cities are under full or partial lockdown,</p>

which could be impacting up to 185 million residents across the country, according to CNN's latest calculation.

That includes [Shanghai](#) — the nation's leading financial center and a major manufacturing and shipping hub. The city has been under a lockdown since March 28. Although authorities started to lift some restrictions last month, more than 8 million residents are still banned from leaving their residential compounds.

The Chinese government still adheres to its stringent zero-Covid policy more than two years after the initial outbreak — at a time when the rest of the world is learning to live with Covid. The policy involves mandatory mass testing and strict lockdowns to contain the spread of the virus.

But economic costs are rising.

Many economists have downgraded their China GDP growth targets for this year, citing risks from the zero-Covid policy. Last month, the International Monetary Fund lowered its China growth forecast to 4.4%, well below the government's official target of [about 5.5%](#).

In recent days, Chinese leaders have repeatedly tried to reassure the public about fixing the economy. President Xi Jinping last week called for [an infrastructure spending spree](#) to promote growth. And the Communist Party's Politburo on Friday promised "specific measures" to [support the internet economy](#).

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HEADLINE	05/05 WHO: more Covid deaths than reported
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/05/health/covid-excess-mortality-who-data/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)About 14.9 million people around the world died as a direct or indirect result of Covid-19 in the period between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2021, according to new estimates from the World Health Organization -- nearly three times more deaths than were officially reported.</p> <p>There were 5.4 million Covid-19 deaths reported to WHO during that timeframe, resulting in an excess mortality estimate of 9.5 million more deaths than what was reported.</p> <p>"Excess mortality is the difference between the number of deaths that have been recorded and those that would be expected in the absence of the pandemic," said Samira Asma, assistant director-general for the Data, Analytics and Delivery for Impact Division of WHO.</p> <p>The 14.9 million deaths include "deaths directly attributed to Covid-19 that were reported to WHO, deaths directly attributed to Covid-19 that were not counted or reported ... deaths indirectly associated with the pandemic due to the wider impact on health systems and society," Asma explained. The figure also subtracts any deaths that were avoided due to changes in social behaviors, such as fewer fatalities from car wrecks because of lockdowns or travel restrictions.</p> <p>The estimated range of excess deaths was 13.3 million to 16.6 million over the 24-month period, according to the methodology used in the WHO report.</p> <p>This metric paints a fuller picture of the extent of the pandemic and can be used to guide and implement public health policies, according to Asma.</p> <p>"When we underestimate, we may underinvest. And when we undercount, we may miss targeting the interventions where they are needed most, and this also deepens inequalities," she said.</p> <p>William Msemburi, technical officer with WHO's Department of Data and Analytics, said that about 57% of the excess deaths were in men, and 82% were in people above the age of 60.</p>

Nearly 70% of the excess deaths were concentrated in 10 countries, Msemburi said, including the United States.

In April, the Indian Ministry of Health disputed WHO's excess data estimates for that country, calling the data "questionable" in a statement on Twitter.

Msemburi said India reported 481,000 Covid-19 deaths over the 24-month period -- but WHO's methodology shows that there were nearly 10 times as many, estimating 4.74 million excess deaths, with a range of 3.3 million to 6.5 million excess deaths.

CNN has reached out to the Indian Health Ministry for comment about the report, but did not immediately hear back. According to the Indian Ministry of Health, 523,975 people have died due to Covid-19 since the beginning of the pandemic.

At a briefing Wednesday, Asma said WHO will continue to engage with India to come to a "mutual consensus with regard to the different estimates" in the data.

Somnath Chatterji, senior adviser with the Department of Data and Analytics, emphasized the importance of the excess mortality numbers in WHO's report.

"These are not numbers for the sake of numbers," Chatterji said, noting that in addition to the number of deaths directly attributable to Covid-19, the data "estimate the collateral damage that has happened because of Covid, because of disruptions in health services."

"So if these numbers were to be tracked in a timely manner, then actually, governments would have been able to drive interventions to the right people at the right time at the right place, right? Which has clearly not happened, and which is why we are seeing these excess deaths," he said.

"These sobering data not only point to the impact of the pandemic but also to the need for all countries to invest in more resilient health systems that can sustain essential health services during crises, including stronger health information systems," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a news release. "WHO is committed to working with all countries to strengthen their health information systems to generate better data for better decisions and better outcomes."

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HEADLINE	05/05 Climate change: harder to fight wildfires
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/05/climate/wildfires-prescribed-burn.html
GIST	<p>Summer is still more than a month and a half away, but enormous wildfires have already consumed landscapes and darkened skies in Arizona, New Mexico and Nebraska. Whipping winds threw flames across the terrain around Boulder, Colo., in December and March.</p> <p>In Boulder, worries about wildfire used to be focused around August and late summer, when lightning strikes can ignite the timbers. "Now the focus is every month," said John Potter, a deputy director at the city's Open Space and Mountain Parks department.</p> <p>As deadly wildfires become a terrifying fixture of life for many Americans, more of the country is embracing an ancient tool to limit the devastation: careful, controlled burns that clear away vegetation and help prevent wildfires from exploding into catastrophes. But in many places, the changing climate is making intentional burns much more complicated to carry out.</p> <p>The United States Forest Service used prescribed fire across a record 1.8 million acres of federal land last year, and the agency is aiming to treat an additional 50 million acres with fire and mechanical brush thinning over the coming decade. President Biden's infrastructure law puts \$5 billion toward reducing combustible flora and combating wildfires in other ways. California, Oregon and other states are exploring legal changes to encourage more burning.</p>

With human-caused global warming [heating up and drying out](#) large parts of the country, however, [wildfire seasons](#) are growing longer, narrowing the windows for performing controlled fires safely. Shifting patterns of rain and wind are adding to the complications for burners. In many states, efforts to treat more land with fire are also running up against bureaucratic hurdles and funding and personnel shortages.

So far this spring, exceptionally dry and windy conditions have prevented Boulder's mountain parks department from carrying out any major burns, Mr. Potter said. That raises plenty of concern about how bad wildfires could get this summer.

"Fingers crossed," he said.

Even in humid Florida, changing conditions are forcing land managers to get creative about when they burn, said J. Morgan Varner, the director of fire research at Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy in Tallahassee. Heavy rains derailed plans in March, which is usually prime season for burning in the state. "We're dealing with a really dynamic climate that makes planning difficult," Dr. Varner said.

For much of the past century, America's approach to fires was to put out any and all of them. A series of devastating blazes in 1910 hardened the government's belief that fire was the enemy. Indigenous land-management practices were cast aside as pseudoscience; intentional burning was regarded as the behavior of woods arsonists and miscreants.

But the ferocious infernos of recent years have called attention to the need for a better way. Scientists now believe the long focus on fire suppression left the nation's forests overcrowded and overgrown — one reason today's wildfires are so destructive.

Between 2005 and 2019, major blazes in the West and the Great Plains burned nearly four times as much total area each year, and took place nearly twice as often, compared with the last two decades of the 20th century, [one recent study](#) found. Since 1979, nearly every part of the globe where wildfires are a problem has experienced more extreme heat and dryness, [other recent research](#) has shown.

In California, the winter rainy season is getting shorter but more intense, [scientists say](#). This gives grass and brush more time to dry out and turn flammable in the fall, while still providing them ample water to grow the following spring — a double whammy for wildfire risk.

"I don't think people realize that we're actually at a point where, some of these fires, we cannot put them out," said Lenya N. Quinn-Davidson, a fire adviser with the University of California Cooperative Extension and director of the Northern California Prescribed Fire Council. "We really need to be thinking in different ways about how we do things."

Changes are afoot in some states. California passed a law last year letting land managers off the hook for firefighting costs in the unlikely event that a properly planned prescribed fire goes awry. [Oregon](#) is looking to do something similar. The California legislature is considering creating a \$20 million fund that would compensate homeowners for losses caused by prescribed burns.

Oregon in 2019 [changed its air quality rules](#) to allow more prescribed fires to take place near towns and communities. Mr. Potter said Boulder's mountain parks department was exploring whether it needed to work with Colorado officials to re-examine air quality strictures. The trade-off, of course, might be more smoke choking residents' lungs.

"There's still sometimes that lack of understanding that a little smoke right now can save us from a whole lot of smoke later on," said Jessica E. Halofsky, director of the Forest Service's Northwest Climate Hub in Olympia, Wash.

Only a tiny share of prescribed fires [get out of control](#) and cause injuries or damage to homes. But when they do, they can leave long-lasting distrust.

In Bastrop County, Texas, heavy gusts whipped a prescribed fire in January into a blaze that took nearly a week to contain. An [independent investigation](#) later found that, while conditions that day technically met the standards for a safe burn, the state had failed to have enough staff on site and a bulldozer for contingencies.

The incident stoked memories of a [wildfire](#) that ripped through the same area in 2011, destroying 1,600 homes and killing several people.

“The folks that are still here from 2011, they’re always nervous,” said Roxanne Hernandez, a Bastrop County resident. After the 2011 blaze, Ms. Hernandez completed a training program in prescribed fire and started carrying out burns on her 53-acre ranch. But for other residents, she said, “it’s back to Smokey the Bear: ‘Put it out!’ And that’s not the answer.”

Crews and managers trained in prescribed fire are in short supply in many places, foresters say. Many of the same people are also called upon to help extinguish wildfires.

“As the wildfire seasons get longer, those folks are gone for longer,” said Dan Porter, the forest program director in California at The Nature Conservancy, an environmental nonprofit. “When they come back, we may say, ‘Hey, would you like to go do a prescribed fire?’ Well, they’ve been out cutting line for four months and breathing smoke for four months. They need to go see their family and take a break.”

Ms. Quinn-Davidson of the University of California Cooperative Extension has hosted courses as part of a [new program](#) to train more people to lead prescribed fires in their communities. But with so many of California’s catastrophic wildfires taking place on federal land, only bigger policy changes and large-scale prescribed fire projects can stop further harm to the broader landscape, she said.

Last summer, the Forest Service’s chief, Randy Moore, restricted the use of prescribed fire on agency lands to make sure resources were available to fight wildfires. He also ordered a pause on allowing backcountry fires to burn if they provided ecological benefits and didn’t threaten homes or infrastructure.

The halt was temporary, but it was enough to make some ecologists fear that officials’ recent championing of fire could still go into reverse. If the goal is to return the land to an older ecological state, one in which frequent natural fires kept forests vibrant and resilient, then the scale of the task is staggering.

California [is aiming](#) to use prescribed fire on 300,000 acres of land annually by 2025. [Far more](#) of the state burned each year in centuries past, before intensive modern settlements transformed the landscape, [scientists have estimated](#). Smoke and haze fouled the skies through much of summer and fall.

It may not be practical or desirable to go back to that world in its entirety. Still, as more human activity spreads into onetime wilderness, societies will have to learn to accept fire in one form or another, said Heath D. Starns, a fire researcher at Texas A&M University and president of the Prescribed Burn Alliance of Texas.

“It’s a process that really needs to occur, ecologically,” Dr. Starns said. “And our best option is to live with it, but to determine when, where and under what conditions fires happen.”

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HEADLINE	05/05 Today is Cinco de Mayo
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/article/cinco-de-mayo-celebration.html
GIST	More than being an excuse to treat oneself to nachos, tacos, mezcal and margaritas, Cinco de Mayo has a history that runs deep and continues to serve as a vehicle conveying Mexican culture, pride and values.

Here are a few things to know about the day:

What's the significance of Cinco de Mayo?

Cinco de Mayo commemorates Mexico's unexpected victory over France in the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862. The conflict between the two countries had begun in 1861, after Benito Juárez, then the president of Mexico, suspended the nation's foreign debt payments, and Napoleon III responded by sending French troops to invade.

The victory in Puebla galvanized the Mexican forces but turned out to be short-lived, and France later occupied the country, installing Maximilian I as emperor. Not until 1867 did the new Mexican Republic finally expel the French, execute Maximilian I and regain control of the country.

When and where is Cinco de Mayo celebrated?

Cinco de Mayo literally means "May 5" in Spanish, which is when this celebration of Mexican heritage falls each year. The day, mostly commemorated by Mexican Americans north of the U.S. border, is also celebrated in Puebla, the town and region southeast of Mexico City, where the holiday originated.

Is Cinco de Mayo Mexico's Independence Day?

No. Cinco de Mayo is often mistaken for Mexico's Independence Day in the United States, but Mexican independence is actually celebrated Sept. 16. On that day, in 1810, a priest named Miguel Hidalgo called upon the Mexican people to revolt against the rule of Spain, eventually leading to the War for Independence, which ended in 1821.

How did the holiday come to be celebrated in the United States?

Jessica Lavariega Monforti, the vice provost at California State University, Channel Islands, said that Cinco de Mayo had been celebrated in California every year since its inception in 1863. In that first year, Mexicans and Americans in the state came together to mark the anniversary of the Battle of Puebla and use it to raise money and recruit men to aid those still fighting under the leadership of Juárez against the French.

Those early celebrations, Lavariega Monforti said, were mostly about fighting for democracy and freedom against white supremacists and other oppressors — both in Mexico and in Civil War-era California, where Latinos mostly favored a Union victory over the Confederacy.

Cinco de Mayo continued to be celebrated in the United States, largely thanks to the efforts of those of Mexican descent. Jeffrey M. Pilcher, a professor of history at the University of Toronto, said followers of the dictator Porfirio Díaz, who ruled Mexico intermittently between 1876 and 1911, and had been a general in the Battle of Puebla, continued to celebrate Cinco de Mayo while living in exile in the American south.

The celebration gradually became a festival for Mexicans and Mexican Americans across the country, as well as part of a developing Mexican-American civil rights movement that started in the 1940s. Many activists started pointing to Cinco de Mayo as a source of pride, Lavariega Monforti said.

Over time, however, that message of cultural pride seemed to get lost. Pilcher said that Cinco de Mayo began to take off in the United States in the 1970s and '80s, when brewing companies began capitalizing on it as a way to appeal to consumers amid the rising popularity of Mexican restaurants.

"By the 1990s, most of the public discourse about the day had been refocused on it as a time to consume imported beer, tequila and Mexican food," Lavariega Monforti said.

What are some ways people celebrate Cinco de Mayo?

In Mexico, the festivity is marked in the state of Puebla with historical re-enactments of the Battle of Puebla, parades, mariachi music, colorful costumes and fireworks. "For many Mexicans, however, May 5 is a day like any other. It is not a federal holiday, so offices, banks and stores remain open," said Lavariega Monforti.

Celebrations are more visible in the United States. Lavariega Monforti said that some communities in the United States, especially those with roots in the Puebla region, have attempted to reclaim the celebration as their own in recent years.

These efforts are mostly visible in larger cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago, where events are dedicated to the celebrations of dance, literature and food from Puebla. In New York City, some Mexican folkloric troupes are also treating Cinco de Mayo as an opportunity to direct attention to the historic events and culture of the Puebla region.

“It seems that these efforts are direct responses to the consumerism surrounding Cinco de Mayo, and the commercialization of Latino culture in the United States,” Lavariega Monforti said.

U.S. presidents traditionally mark the occasion, too. President Joe Biden and Jill Biden, the first lady, will host a Cinco de Mayo reception in the Rose Garden on Thursday, which will also be attended by Beatriz Gutierrez Muller, the first lady of Mexico.

What should I eat on Cinco de Mayo?

There is no Mexican dish associated with the festivity, Pilcher explained, but it can still be an occasion to gather and honor Mexico’s, and Puebla’s own, culinary traditions.

Pedro Reyes, a Mexican food writer and creative director at Paladar, a Mexican company devoted to the development of culinary projects, said that mole poblano, the chocolate-rich version of mole that originated in Puebla, might be a good pick for a Cinco de Mayo-inspired feast. He suggested pairing the dish with chalupas, small fried tortillas enjoyed with a variety of fillings; white rice; nopales salad; fried beans; and molotes de plátano, stuffed plantain patties.

Besides beer and tequila, beverages could include agua fresca, a light fruit drink in flavors like hibiscus, horchata and tamarind, as well as pulque, a fermented alcoholic drink.

And please, keep your peas as far as you can from your avocados, at least on this occasion. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, I like them, I can eat them,” Reyes said. “But where’s the need to mess with my guacamole?”

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HEADLINE	05/04 Kremlin: Putin won't declare war on May 9 th
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2022-05-04/putin-wont-declare-war-on-ukraine-on-victory-day-despite-western-fears-kremlin-says
GIST	<p>President Vladimir Putin will not formally declare war against Ukraine on Victory Day on Monday, the Kremlin says, despite growing fears in the West that the Russian leader will move beyond the “special military operation” that he currently calls his invasion of the former Soviet ally and unleash the full breadth of Russia’s military might.</p> <p>Leaders in the U.S. and U.K. have privately expressed concern in recent days that Putin would make the declaration during the high-profile holiday, the date Russians celebrate their triumph over Nazi Germany during World War II. May 9 has become the premier opportunity for the former global power to display its military strength.</p> <p>Though seemingly a benign rhetorical shift, declaring war on Ukraine – a term Putin has so far refused to use – would allow him to activate reserve forces and other elements of the military that could dramatically alter the burgeoning stalemate and steady Russian losses on the ground. Western officials have based their concerns on what they perceive to be Russia’s continued failures to seize and hold territory, particularly in eastern Ukraine, a region known as the Donbas that has become the latest focus of Putin’s invasion.</p>

White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki suggested on Tuesday that a formal declaration of war could also precede a stepped-up campaign by Moscow to install pro-Russia “sham” governments in cities inside Ukrainian territory it now controls.

“That’s nonsense,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Wednesday, when asked about the reports that Putin would declare war.

Russian forces in the Donbas have appeared to operate with growing urgency in recent days to surround Ukrainian troops there, according to U.S. and U.K. intelligence assessments – an apparent act of desperation to provide Putin with some good news to share on Monday for his campaign to free Russian-speaking Ukrainians from what he calls a Nazi regime in Kyiv.

Russia has also stepped up indiscriminate shelling of cities across Ukraine, including the capital, which Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Tuesday likely amounts to an attempt to cut off Ukrainian supply lines.

Shortages of Russia’s military stockpiles, however, preceded its decision to use less precise ordnance and “dumb bombs” that make civilian casualties much more likely. It has also continued to shell the strategic port city of Mariupol despite assurances it would allow international aid workers to help evacuate civilians trapped there.

In his regular late-night address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy offered to his citizens and to the world that Russia’s actions are not those of a confident military power.

“The scale of today’s shelling clearly does not indicate that Russia has any special military purpose,” Zelenskiy said late Tuesday. “They are trying to vent their powerlessness. Because they can’t beat Ukraine.”

The Kremlin has clamped down on any domestic news coverage that projects anything but glowing assessments of the Russian military’s performance in Ukraine since it invaded on Feb. 24. The blackout accounts for relatively high support for the operation among Russian citizens and a shared sense that the government in Kyiv under Zelenskiy presents a threat to Russia, analysts say.

Other assessments suggest the military Putin will display in high-profile parades on Monday has become fundamentally weaker as a result of the latest invasion, despite his doubling defense spending over the last 15 years for modernization efforts.

“The modernisation of its physical equipment has not enabled Russia to dominate Ukraine,” British military intelligence concludes, according to an assessment shared with reporters on Tuesday. “Failures both in strategic planning and operational execution have left it unable to translate numerical strength into decisive advantage.”

“Russia’s military is now significantly weaker, both materially and conceptually, as a result of its invasion of Ukraine. Recovery from this will be exacerbated by sanctions. This will have a lasting impact on Russia’s ability to deploy conventional military force,” it stated.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Tensions rise in Moldova
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-moldova-separatists-idUSKCN2MQ1M8
GIST	CHISINAU (Reuters) - Moldova’s pro-Russian separatist region criticised the EU on Wednesday for promising military aid to Chisinau, and warned of a danger of further escalation after what it has described as a week of terrorist attacks from Ukraine.

Fears have increased in recent days that Moldova could be drawn into the conflict in neighbouring Ukraine, after pro-Russian separatists in Moldova's Transnistria region blamed Kyiv for what they said were shootings, explosions and cross-border drone incursions.

"The situation is alarming because Transnistria has suffered terrorist attacks," Vitaly Ignatiev, foreign minister of the administration of the self-declared breakaway Transnistria region, told Reuters in an interview by video link from his office in Tiraspol, the region's capital.

He repeated the separatists' earlier accusations that Ukraine was behind incidents of unrest that Transnistria has reported since last week, and said another drone from Ukraine armed with explosives had been brought down on Tuesday.

"Honestly, I don't see any reason why the Ukrainian side would use such methods against Transnistria. Transnistria does not threaten Ukraine," he said. "I have said several times we are an absolutely peaceful state."

Moldova, a tiny, mainly Romanian-speaking country wedged between Romania and Ukraine, has faced an unresolved separatist conflict for 30 years. A contingent of Russian peacekeepers is based in mainly Russian-speaking Transnistria, which stretches along most of the Ukrainian border.

Moldova's pro-Western government has strongly backed Kyiv since the Russian invasion, and on March 3, a week after Russian troops rolled into Ukraine, Chisinau submitted a formal request to join the EU.

Charles Michel, head of the EU's council of member states, visited Chisinau on Wednesday in a show of solidarity, saying the bloc was considering additional military aid to support Chisinau. He gave no details, but Chisinau has said the aid it is seeking is non-lethal.

Referring to Michel's promise of military aid, Ignatiev said: "Of course such statements, such actions do not add to the calm, but on the contrary contribute to tension and interfere with the normalisation of the situation."

The separatists denied a request from Reuters for permission to report from Transnistria, saying all accreditations for foreign journalists had been halted in the wake of last week's attacks.

Asked if he could rule out the possibility of Russia using its military base in Transnistria to attack Ukraine, Ignatiev said he could not speak for Moscow.

He did, however, distance himself from remarks by a Russian general, who said last month that one of Moscow's war aims was to seize Ukrainian territory to link up with Transnistria.

"I think in these difficult circumstances, it is important to be extremely careful in one's statements. And even more careful in actions," he said of the general's remarks.

Ignatiev dismissed Moldova's bid to join the EU as "detached from reality", and said it would create the additional risk of a resurgence in hostilities, because Chisinau had taken the decision "unilaterally".

"Moldova and Transnistria are in a state of unresolved conflict...An unresolved conflict probably means Moldova should first resolve the conflict and then decide its political future," he said.

Moldovan President Maia Sandu said on Wednesday she did not see an "imminent" threat of unrest, but that the country was nevertheless prepared for the possibility of "pessimistic" scenarios in coming days.

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SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-steps-up-attacks-on-ukraine-railways-other-infrastructure-11651743013?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>Russia is intensifying strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure, seeking to disrupt deliveries of Western weapons as Moscow's offensives in the east appear to have stalled.</p> <p>Ukraine's state railway operator said Thursday that 46 passenger trains were delayed by up to 11 hours due to damage from the Russian strikes.</p> <p>Missile strikes in recent days have targeted rail hubs and electrical power facilities—in particular in Ukraine's west, where arms are flowing into the country from the U.S. and its allies.</p> <p>"They are attempting to hit what we assess to be critical infrastructure targets out towards the west," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday. "We think this is an effort to try to disrupt the Ukrainians' ability to replenish and reinforce themselves."</p> <p>A Russian missile hit railway infrastructure in the eastern city of Dnipro late Wednesday, halting trains, Ukrainian officials said. The rail network in the city, a hub for Ukraine's military efforts in the east, was also hit by two missiles Tuesday, part of one of the largest barrages since Russia invaded on Feb. 24.</p> <p>Missile strikes late Tuesday hit two water pumping stations and three power substations in the western city of Lviv, knocking out electricity in part of the city, the mayor said.</p> <p>The Russian Defense Ministry said Thursday it had used air-launched missiles to strike the Kanatovo military airfield in the Kirovohrad region, as well as a large ammunition depot and a fuel-storage facility for Ukrainian military equipment in the Mykolayiv region on the Black Sea.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials in those regions confirmed strikes overnight but didn't give an assessment of the targets and levels of damage.</p> <p>Mr. Kirby said the Pentagon couldn't offer an immediate assessment of the impact of the latest Russian strikes, but noted the inaccuracy of many of Russia's missiles.</p> <p>"Their ability to target with precision has been less than advertised throughout this entire war," he said.</p> <p>Trains around Lviv were particularly affected, the operator said. Lviv, some 30 miles from the border with Poland, is a hub for moving weapons and supplies into Ukraine.</p> <p>Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Wednesday reiterated that Moscow considers any weapons shipments from the West legitimate targets.</p> <p>Ukraine's railways have been critical for moving weapons and evacuating civilians. A Russian missile strike on a station in the eastern city of Kramatorsk killed more than 50 civilians.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that the increased strikes on infrastructure underscored Russia's failing war effort.</p> <p>"They are trying to vent their powerlessness, because they can't beat Ukraine," he said.</p> <p>Ukrainian forces have made recent gains on the battlefield, ousting Russian troops from villages they were using to strike Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-most populous city.</p> <p>Russia has also taken recent setbacks off the battlefield. The European Union on Wednesday proposed a ban on Russian crude and refined oil products, and prepared to impose sanctions on Russian military figures whom EU officials accuse of war crimes.</p>

	<p>Western countries have sought to tighten the economic noose around Russia, and earlier this week Mr. Zelensky called on companies to extricate themselves from Russian commerce.</p> <p>“If any companies remain in the Russian market, that means you are directly supporting that war machine, the terrorist Russian Federation war machine,” Mr. Zelensky said via videolink to The Wall Street Journal’s CEO Council Summit on Tuesday.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky warned executives that doing business with Russia also carried risks.</p> <p>“It seems to you that you have a business with Russia...a profitable business, but one day you wake up to find that a rocket is flying toward you from Russia, and everything changes,” he said through an interpreter. “It’s not possible to do business with someone who tomorrow, instead of payment, will simply send rockets toward you.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/05 Unexplained attacks in Russia territory
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/unexplained-attacks-inside-russian-territory-raise-prospect-of-wider-conflict-11651742076?mod=hp_lead_pos8
GIST	<p>A series of attacks inside Russian territory and unexplained explosions at Russian targets near the border with Ukraine have expanded the scope of the conflict in recent weeks, underscoring Russian vulnerabilities in regions that are crucial to Moscow’s renewed offensive in eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>Russian officials said last month that two Ukrainian Mi-24 helicopters entered Russian airspace flying at low altitudes to evade air defenses and launched a missile attack on a fuel depot in Russia’s Belgorod region, a province that sits on the western edge of the country, less than 20 miles from Ukraine’s war-ravaged city of Kharkiv.</p> <p>Since then, an explosion sparked a blaze at an ammunition depot near the city of Belgorod and blasts have been reported inside the city. Last week, fires erupted at other oil depots, including one at a Russian military base. Other explosions have damaged rail lines beyond Belgorod in the provinces of Kursk and Bryansk. Ukraine has denied a role in the incidents.</p> <p>Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak, who has declined to comment on whether Ukraine had any involvement in the blasts, has said they could have been caused by divine retribution following the killing of Ukrainian civilians.</p> <p>“There may be totally different reasons for the destruction of military infrastructure in border provinces, including even...divine intervention,” he said.</p> <p>Russia blamed Ukraine on Thursday for shelling inside Russia during artillery exchanges between the two sides over the border, but Russian authorities have played down the larger incidents in recent weeks. Regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov denied the city of Belgorod had come under attack by the Ukrainians, telling residents that a series of loud explosions over recent days were the result of military operations, without offering details.</p> <p>But Western analysts believe Ukraine has sought to attack transit and logistics infrastructure inside Russian territory to disrupt Moscow’s effort to concentrate forces in Ukraine’s east.</p> <p>“Ukraine is looking to cross-border operations, and it’s looking for certain targets that could disrupt the Russian war effort,” said Rob Lee, a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, a Philadelphia-based foreign-policy think tank.</p> <p>Belgorod has become a strategically vital logistics hub for Russian plans to take control of eastern Ukraine’s Donbas region and deploy Russian soldiers south toward the urban centers of Slovyansk and Kramatorsk, where Ukraine’s headquarters for operations in the east is located. Ukrainian military</p>

commanders reported last month that Russia's central military district units, a division of the 14th Air Defense Army and Iskander-M ballistic missile units are being sent to Belgorod for eventual deployment to eastern Ukraine.

"Russia wants to make this fight about the Donbas. Ukraine wants to do the exact opposite, to expand the fight as much as possible to prevent Russia from concentrating forces and cross border operations are a way of doing that," said Mr. Lee.

The Institute for the Study of War said in a report that Ukrainian forces will likely continue to conduct cross-border strikes to disrupt Russian logistics, possibly with drone or missile strikes. But new weapons that the Ukrainians will receive from the West are much more powerful than anything they or the Russians currently have, raising the possibility of more strikes deeper inside Russian territory.

Early on in the conflict, Ukraine proved its ability to reach targets inside Russia. The day after Russia launched early-morning missile attacks on Ukrainian military infrastructure on Feb. 24, Kyiv allegedly hit one of the airfields involved in the invasion with a ballistic missile strike that killed one pilot.

Neither Russian nor Ukrainian authorities commented on the strike, but a military academy from which the pilot graduated said he died from wounds he suffered when Ukraine hit the Millerovo Air Base in Russia's Rostov province on Feb. 25 with a Tochka-U ballistic missile.

On April 15, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Russian air-defense systems had shot down a Ukrainian helicopter that had shot at targets in Russia's Bryansk province.

Russia's failure to prevent more of the incidents at fuel depots and railways could be a result of increased intelligence sharing between the West and Ukraine, said Mr. Lee, including information on where Russian air-defense vulnerabilities might be or the use of electronic warfare to compromise Russian air-defense systems.

The strikes on Russia's critical infrastructure have increased since Western officials said Kyiv's war effort could go beyond defending the country to target Russia itself.

A junior U.K. defense minister said last month that it was completely legitimate for Ukraine to strike logistics and supply lines inside Russia with weapons provided by the West, marking [a major shift for the U.K.](#), which for months has provided weapons on the condition they be used to defend Ukraine from Russian attack.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin also said last month that the U.S.'s aim was not just to help Ukraine defend itself but to [see Russia's military capabilities degraded](#) "to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine."

Other analysts haven't ruled out other factors in the blasts, including Russia's lax safety standards. Explosions could also happen as Russia reaches deeper into its strategic reserves of munitions, deploying missiles and artillery that have long lain dormant in military warehouses.

"The explosions might also be the result of accidents, possibly involving Russian munitions being stored within or transported through the military logistics network," said Nick Reynolds, a research analyst at the Royal United Services Institute, a London-based security think tank.

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HEADLINE	05/05 China services sector in the doldrums
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-services-sector-is-in-the-doldrums-as-covid-19-lockdowns-bite-11651739499?mod=hp_lead_pos5

GIST

SINGAPORE—Activity in China’s services sector fell in April to its weakest level since the early days of the pandemic, according to one indicator, as [lockdowns aimed at containing Covid-19](#) shut restaurants and stores and kept millions of people at home.

The data add to evidence that China’s economy slowed sharply last month as authorities imposed sweeping restrictions on businesses and daily life in major cities including Shanghai.

Separately, a survey of almost 400 European businesses operating in China found that just under a quarter were reconsidering their investment plans, as the country’s zero tolerance approach to battling the virus hit their supply chains, staffing and revenue.

Economists say that without an easing of the government’s strict approach to smothering even small outbreaks with mass quarantines for those infected and stay-at-home orders for everyone else, [the economy could shrink](#) in the second quarter for the first time since the pandemic struck in early 2020.

On Thursday, China reported 4,848 locally transmitted new Covid-19 cases for the day earlier, with 4,466 of those logged in Shanghai and 50 in Beijing. There were 13 deaths linked to the disease, all in Shanghai.

Services sector activity tumbled in April at its steepest rate since Covid-19 shut down the city of Wuhan in February 2020, according to an index published by Caixin Media Co. and research company IHS Markit.

The index dropped to 36.2 in April from 42.0 in March as the Covid-19 restrictions spread from city to city, closing businesses and throttling consumer demand for eating out, shopping and other services. A reading above 50 indicates expansion and below 50 points to a contraction. The index sank to a record low of 26.5 in February 2020.

New business orders and exports both fell sharply, while staffing levels dropped for the fourth straight month. Firms cut prices to win what new business they could find, according to the survey.

The deterioration in the services sector offers another glimpse into the growing economic costs of China’s tough approach to the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, which put the entire northeastern province of Jilin and dozens of cities—including Shanghai, a bustling financial hub of 25 million people—under weeks of lockdown.

Official gauges of activity in manufacturing and services, published Saturday, recorded similarly steep drops as restrictions took hold. Factory production slowed or in some cases ground to a halt in regions under lockdown.

A second survey, also published Thursday by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, found that 23% of firms surveyed were considering shifting current or planned investment from China in response to its Covid-19 policies—the highest percentage recorded since 2012, and more than double the proportion considering such a shift at the start of 2022.

Among respondents, 60% said they expect revenue for the year to be below pre-lockdown projections, with 92% saying they have been hit by supply chain disruptions as public-health restrictions have shut factories and severely disrupted transportation.

“The predictability of the Chinese market has gone,” Jörg Wuttke, president of the EU chamber, told a news conference, adding that he hopes the survey will spur Chinese officials to spell out the exit ramp from their zero tolerance approach.

The survey was conducted in late April and polled 372 member businesses.

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HEADLINE**05/04 Shopping, traveling, working out like 2019**

SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/american-consumers-travel-gyms-shopping-11651673590?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>In early 2020, many companies said the pandemic would change everything for consumers. And it did—for a while.</p> <p>Now many Americans are resuming their prepandemic habits: rocking out at crowded concerts, doing deadlifts next to strangers at the gym and stocking a standard supply of toilet paper. Airlines, restaurants and child-care centers, which relied on government loans to stay afloat during Covid-19's peak, can now hardly keep up with demand.</p> <p>Live Nation, which owns Ticketmaster, said concert ticket sales were up 45% as of February 2022 compared with the same period in 2019, the last full prepandemic year. As of February, the company had 30% more concerts planned for 2022 than 2019.</p> <p>Membership levels at gym chain Planet Fitness in January surpassed prepandemic levels following a stretch in which some 25% of the nation's gyms closed, according to industry data.</p> <p>Over two million people traveled by plane each day on average between April 17 and 23, according to the Transportation Security Administration. That figure averaged about 2.4 million in 2019.</p> <p>At the same time, some pandemic stars like Peloton Interactive Inc., Netflix Inc. and Instacart Inc. have taken hits. From hoping that consumers had permanently shifted their behavior, the companies are now considering previously unthinkable changes. Netflix, hit with its first membership decline in a decade, is considering offering a lower-priced ad-supported version. Peloton, losing money and saddled with excess equipment, is lowering the price of its stationary bikes. Instacart slashed its valuation.</p> <p>The resiliency of the American consumer has been a hallmark of modern history. After events such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans or the attacks of 9/11, people have shown they will snap back to doing many of their favorite things, given time.</p> <p>Rarely has it happened so broadly and rapidly as now, two years after a devastating global pandemic began. In the past few months, American consumer tastes have changed rapidly, again, and companies are scrambling to catch up.</p> <p>Emily Chan avoided gatherings of more than five people after the pandemic hit. The 22-year-old public-relations account coordinator now has booked tickets for a Keshi concert, a Brooklyn rave and a flight to Berlin—where she plans to enjoy the city's club scene—over the next two months. She went on her first date since college last month.</p> <p>"I have two years to catch up on, and this is the time," she said.</p> <p>Other consumers and many parts of the country returned to normal months or even a year ago. Attendance at college football games was robust last fall. Ohio, Michigan, Texas, South Carolina and Massachusetts all dropped mask requirements in schools late last year. The latest "Spider-Man" movie has earned more than \$800 million at the domestic box office since its release in December, although analysts don't expect ticket sales for the year overall to hit prepandemic levels.</p> <p>Clearly, the pandemic brought changes that will be long lasting. Teleconferencing is still a big growth industry, the future of commercial real estate in some large cities remains uncertain, the child-care sector has yet to recover and demand for pandemic favorites including online workouts and grocery delivery remains high. But alongside those long-term shifts, companies are also witnessing a general reversion to a 2019 mode of living.</p> <p>The financial results of Clorox Co. are a case study in consumers' changing habits.</p>

In the first year of the pandemic, Americans bought a record amount of household mainstays such as paper towels, toilet paper, flour and spices, and sales at Clorox soared more than 20%. The company rapidly increased production of cleaning wipes, bleach and surface cleaners. A new chief executive, Linda Rendle, had the almost singular priority of ramping up production to meet demand.

With sales returning to more normal levels, the company is reducing overtime and ending some contracts it made with third-party manufacturers at the height of the pandemic, Ms. Rendle said in an interview. Though demand is still higher than before the pandemic, she is cutting costs and predicting sales will fall 1% to 4% for the fiscal year ending June 30.

“The U.S. has really exploded open in the last 30 days,” Ms. Rendle said. “Behaviors and attitudes toward cleaning are still increased, but it’s more normalized. People have a more endemic-level routine.”

Some had expected hygiene to be a yearslong obsession. Hand sanitizer sales are down more than 50% year-to-date compared with a year ago, according to IRI data.

When Covid crept into Merrick, N.Y., Lauren Antin didn’t take any chances. The 36-year-old advertising executive had learned that she was pregnant in February 2020. She wiped down grocery deliveries with Clorox wipes, drank immune-boosting teas and washed her hands obsessively.

Ms. Antin’s husband, a restaurant owner, closed his businesses. Her then 2-year-old son, Harrison, went months without seeing his grandparents or great-grandfather, who live nearby. To keep Harrison entertained, she helped organize a makeshift masked and socially distanced summer camp for the neighborhood children in families’ backyards.

She said that version of herself wouldn’t recognize the one who booked Harrison’s fifth birthday party this month at Chuck E. Cheese—ball pit and all.

“I invited a lot of kids thinking a lot of people would say no, and I have 30 kids coming,” Ms. Antin said.

Chuck E. Cheese parent CEC Entertainment Inc. filed for bankruptcy protection back in June 2020. The company declined to provide sales figures, but said it has seen an increase in birthday party bookings and is returning to normal operations.

In March, the Antins flew to Orlando, Fla., for a 300-person wedding. They also went to Walt Disney World, where Ms. Antin said the lines were longer than she had ever seen them. They weren’t able to get tickets to any of the parks other than Magic Kingdom. The others were sold out. A Walt Disney Co. spokeswoman said the company is still limiting capacity at theme parks.

With people primping to go out in public, they are spending more on deodorant, teeth whiteners, razors and cosmetics, according to IRI. They’re less enthusiastic about cooking and baking at home. Craft beer sales at groceries are down, while bars and restaurants are doing more business.

In March, just 9% of doctors’ appointments were done through telehealth, according to Zocdoc. In May 2020, almost 30% had been.

Streaming service Netflix, now forced to compete with the return of live events, dinners out and kids’ birthday parties, posted its first subscriber loss in a decade in the most recent quarter. It expects to lose another two million global subscribers in the current period. The company said password sharing is a part of the problem.

Peloton has lowered its revenue forecasts for several quarters in a row. New Chief Executive Barry McCarthy is working to make the company more reliant on subscriptions to its connected workout classes and digital offerings, and less dependent on sales of exercise equipment.

Peloton has slashed prices of its namesake bikes. He said the biggest question facing the company is figuring out how many people want to work out at home in a postpandemic world. “We’ll know the answer to that question when we can look in the rearview mirror,” he said.

Since January, visits to fitness chains and exercise studios like Pure Barre and CorePower Yoga, LLC have nearly doubled. Even hot yoga, with its deep breathing and mutual sweat exchange, is back.

Instructor Gina McKiernan said most of the classes she teaches in Nassau County, N.Y., have been filled to their still slightly reduced, 26-person capacity in recent weeks, and that participants no longer have to wear a mask. With three children 5 and under and a husband working from home, she hadn’t been able to find space in her home to teach classes remotely—which she didn’t find ideal anyway.

“It’s not the same as giving sweaty hugs to your friends,” she said.

Atlanta money manager Daniel Morgan started thinking about how to invest in the return to normal consumer habits late in 2020. Reading through annual reports and talking with management, two firms jumped to the top of his list: TJX Cos., owner of T.J. Maxx, HomeGoods and other stores, and Olive Garden-owner Darden Restaurants Inc.

Both companies had faced financial hardship during the depths of the pandemic, suspended their dividends and seen their stocks nosedive. By 2021, Mr. Morgan thought both were ripe to surge higher and added to his positions.

“People were like, T.J. Maxx is never going to come back. But there is always a market for people that want a deal,” said Mr. Morgan, a senior portfolio manager at Synovus Trust Co.

In its most recent quarterly earnings report, TJX’s profit more than doubled from a year earlier, while its revenue rose 27%.

The Direxion Work From Home ETF—which aims to track dozens of companies benefiting from the shift to remote work, such as cloud-communications company Twilio Inc. and Zoom Video Communications Inc.—is down about 5% in the past eight weeks, while the U.S. Global Jets ETF, which tracks airlines, has rallied about 20%.

Jodi Giovino, an insurance agent from St. Pete Beach, Fla., wasn’t comfortable flying during the pandemic and relied on daily video calls to connect with her grandson and 4-year-old granddaughter. The 56-year-old almost got to Buffalo, N.Y., to see them several times, but said that whenever she made a reservation, Covid-related regulations would change.

She was finally able to meet her grandson, who is about to turn 2, for the first time last month.

“Seeing me, it’s like they’d been watching Mickey and Minnie on TV, and then they came to Disney in real life,” Ms. Giovino said.

March brought a pronounced shift in Americans’ lifestyles and buying patterns, said Selin Malkoc, associate professor of marketing at Ohio State University. Less news coverage of Covid was a big factor, Ms. Malkoc said, as was the decision from many schools to drop mask mandates.

People had favorable views of face coverings through January, according to a study that Ms. Malkoc is helping run. By March, even many of those who had held tight to mask wearing throughout the pandemic said they believed masks were no longer necessary.

She expects that habits people picked up that are enjoyable or convenient, like streaming entertainment, grocery delivery or remote meetings, would outlive the pandemic, although at a lower intensity. Habits

	<p>related to hygiene and safety, which add more work to people's routines, are more likely to fade, she said.</p> <p>She knows firsthand how people are packing their calendars to make up for lost time. Ms. Malkoc said she and one of her best friends, whom she saw regularly during the pandemic, can't get their schedules to align.</p> <p>"We thought, 'How is this possible?' " she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Russians confront toll for invading Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-coffins-come-home-russians-confront-toll-of-ukraine-invasion-11651668169?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2
GIST	<p>There wasn't much left of Russian army Sgt. Andrei Akhromov's body when it arrived in a zinc coffin at his hometown, a four-hour drive south of Moscow, relatives said. The 21-year-old died in April near the Ukrainian city of Chernihiv when his tank was hit by enemy fire.</p> <p>Sgt. Akhromov's cousin, Sergei Akhromov, said a representative of the regional governor's office told the family it took the armed forces three weeks to identify what remained of him using DNA analysis. Loved ones didn't look into the casket before burying him last week, he said.</p> <p>"I only blame America—not Ukraine, not Russia," Mr. Akhromov, a 32-year-old parks-and-recreation worker, said. "Biden, or however he is called, allowed for Nazism to flourish in Ukraine, and so Russia had to fight not only to protect its people and borders, but also the Ukrainian people, women, children, elderly."</p> <p>More than two months after Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine, Russians are beginning to confront the toll of the war. Mr. Putin has justified his actions by saying Ukraine, which has a Jewish president, is run by Nazis—a claim for which he hasn't provided evidence.</p> <p>Russia's Defense Ministry said in late March that 1,351 Russian soldiers had died in what it calls a "special military operation." It hasn't released any casualty numbers since. Western governments estimate that as many as 15,000 Russians have died—more than the total lost over the course of the Soviet Union's decadelong war in Afghanistan.</p> <p>The Kremlin has portrayed the war as a battle to defend Russia against an aggressive West and as a continuation of Russia's World War II fight against fascism. It is a narrative repeated by state media and one that fits with a worldview—encouraged by the government for years—that a hostile West is trying to keep Russia down.</p> <p>Russia's initial offensive thrusts into the north of Ukraine failed, thwarted by a fierce resistance. Moscow says forces have refocused their efforts on the east and the south. The war has settled into a grinding conflict, with Ukraine getting weapons supplies from the U.S. and some of its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies.</p> <p>Since the invasion, Russia has bombed residential areas in cities across Ukraine, killing more than 3,000 civilians, the United Nations said Monday. Ukraine says about 3,000 of its soldiers have died. One of Russia's more punishing sieges has been of the key southern port city of Mariupol, which has been leveled, as desperate residents have struggled to escape. More than 5.5 million Ukrainians have fled the country, according to the U.N.</p> <p>Mr. Akhromov remembers his cousin as gregarious and kind and said he joined the army out of a belief that he had a duty to serve his country. Mr. Akhromov said Russia should use more powerful weapons. "I would use something stronger—other than nuclear, of course," Mr. Akhromov said. "So many guys are dying for no reason."</p>

Alexei Kozubenko's 21-year-old son, Dmitry, an army private, was killed in action in March. Mr. Kozubenko declined to share details about where his son fought or how he died. An obituary in a local news outlet said he served in the 37th Separate Guards Motor Rifle Brigade, which Ukraine says was deployed in the suburbs around Kyiv before retreating last month.

Mr. Kozubenko, 51, served as a military officer, and Dmitry's grandfather served too—though neither ever fought in battle. “There is a profession called defending your motherland,” said Mr. Kozubenko. “And if he didn't die under a fence in a drunken or drug-addled stupor, or in a gang feud, but like a real man with a weapon in his hands, then that means it was an honorable death.”

Mr. Kozubenko said he supports the offensive. “But I'm opposed to it being so humane,” he said. “As soon as there is a single shot from a residential area, it should be leveled to the ground. If you treat people like animals, you should be treated the same.”

A survey published by the independent Levada Center pollster in late April found that 57% of Russians blame the U.S. or NATO for the deaths and devastation in Ukraine, while only 7% blamed Russia. The survey also found that 74% of Russians supported the offensive—a slight drop from the previous month.

Some experts suggest treating such wartime polling with caution given a government crackdown on dissent that has seen Russians lose their jobs and receive steep fines for speaking out against war. Russian law imposes prison sentences of up to 15 years for what the Kremlin considers to be fake news about its invasion.

Denis Volkov, Levada's director, said he felt there were deep roots to the pro-war views he was hearing and that he found Russians are increasingly trusting state-controlled television during wartime. He also said the antiwar Russians Levada surveyed spoke at length about their position.

“There is a foundational understanding that the West is against us, that we wanted to be friends with them but they spat in our soul in the 1990s,” Mr. Volkov said. “It's a mix of grievances, all mixed together, plus propaganda, strengthened by Putin. It's very serious.”

Russia's Defense Ministry uses social media to daily recount what it says were heroic deeds on the battlefield. The stories, which invoke World War II-era heroism, are relayed by state television broadcasters and in local media.

An obituary published last month by a local paper in the Arctic city of Norilsk said three locals had given their lives fighting “shoulder-to-shoulder to expel the ghost of the Third Reich.”

A local news website in Orenburg, a central region bordering Kazakhstan, wrote last week that a local soldier drew enemy fire so others could escape. When they returned to retrieve his body, they found that he had blown himself up with his last grenade.

The outlet, Orenday, has tallied more than 80 deaths of soldiers from Orenburg alone, citing announcements by local authorities, universities, schools and relatives on social media.

A 42-year-old mother in Orenburg said her son, who was killed in early March, had joined the army after graduating from college with a legal degree last year. The 21-year-old private died in Chernihiv, a military representative told her when he showed up at her home on March 10 to inform her of her son's death.

“It's prestigious to serve,” she said. She said she blamed Ukraine for the conflict.

In North Ossetia in southern Russia, Valeria Gagieva, 25, said almost everyone knows someone who has died in the fighting. Her cousin, 32-year-old Georgy Gagiev, died on the second day of the offensive near the northern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, she said.

	<p>A captain in the National Guard, he had always wanted to defend his country, Ms. Gagieva said. She said people he served with told the family he jumped out of an armored vehicle after it came under fire and was subsequently blown up by an enemy grenade.</p> <p>Her brother, who also serves in the National Guard, was wounded in the fighting, she said. He is now back on the battlefield after receiving treatment at a field hospital. Ms. Gagieva said she is worried she could lose him too, but is proud of him.</p> <p>Elbrus Doev, a former teacher, was known as the “computer doctor” in the North Ossetian village of Nogkau for repairing electronics for fellow villagers for free, according to his grandmother, Zamira Khamatkanova.</p> <p>Mr. Doev, 27, died on March 12 when a shell hit his armored personnel carrier near “nationalist positions” outside Mariupol, his aunt, Kristina Bogaeva, said.</p> <p>Ms. Bogaeva said she believes her nephew is a hero for defending Russia and liberating Ukrainians, and that he and other Russian soldiers are dying because the Kremlin is pursuing a policy of protecting Ukrainian civilians.</p> <p>“Russian forces came to save them and send them humanitarian help from all over, and they still aren’t happy,” Ms. Bogaeva said. “Then why are we saving them? Let them die at the hands of the nationalists.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Trade deficit widens to record \$109.8B
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/surge-in-imports-widens-u-s-trade-deficit-to-109-8-billion-record-11651669130?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>Inflation, supply imbalances and strong demand for imported goods widened the U.S. trade deficit to a record in March, with clothing, computers, and vehicles driving the surge.</p> <p>The trade gap in goods and services widened by 22.3% in March from the prior month to a seasonally adjusted \$109.8 billion, the Commerce Department said Wednesday. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the trade deficit had hovered for years between \$40 billion and \$50 billion a month.</p> <p>Imports rose by 10.3% to \$351.5 billion as the U.S. took in far more goods than it exported. In March, the gridlock at U.S. ports eased, alleviating supply-chain congestion that has disrupted trade during the pandemic and freeing up more goods for store shelves. Exports also rose a robust 5.6% in March on higher shipments of industrial supplies and as more travelers came to the U.S. for vacation.</p> <p>Pandemic-related disruptions remain an issue for trade, however. Economists expect that strict lockdowns in China related to an increase in Covid-19 cases and the war in Ukraine could hinder the global economy and supply chains in the months ahead. That could hit demand for U.S. exports. At the same time, a strong dollar is poised to help keep appetite for imports high.</p> <p>“It’s still that story of really robust economic demand at home versus a weak backdrop abroad,” said Mahir Rasheed, U.S. economist at Oxford Economics. U.S. exports and imports have grown rapidly after collapsing earlier in the pandemic, which closed factories and businesses around the world.</p> <p>Mr. Rasheed said he expects the trade gap to remain wide in the near term. Later this year, strong U.S. demand for goods could be damped by Federal Reserve moves to raise interest rates to cool the economy and bring down inflation, which is running at a four-decade high.</p> <p>Global trade has been volatile, with companies struggling with shipping backlogs, product scarcity, order cancellations and delays.</p>

Return to Top	<p>The trade imbalance weighed on U.S. gross domestic product in the first quarter as businesses and consumers faced high inflation, a shortage of available workers and rising borrowing costs.</p> <p>Imports of industrial supplies, consumer goods and vehicles rose sharply in March, likely reflecting price increases that have contributed to high U.S. inflation.</p> <p>The conflict in Ukraine also intensified in March, sending petroleum prices higher and U.S. gasoline costs to a record. The Biden administration banned Russian oil imports on March 8. March petroleum imports were the highest since December 2014, adjusted for seasonality, the Commerce Department said.</p> <p>Separate figures released Wednesday indicated higher prices were affecting business activity at U.S. services companies. The Institute for Supply Management said U.S. service-sector activity in April grew more slowly than in March. The report said high inflation, capacity constraints and logistical challenges are weighing on businesses, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict is affecting costs of materials such as fuel and chemicals.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 FDA officials eye annual fall Covid shots
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/science/2022/05/despite-unknowns-fda-officials-make-the-case-for-annual-fall-covid-shots/
GIST	<p>The pandemic coronavirus will likely become a seasonal respiratory virus, much like influenza, requiring annual booster shots each fall, according to three top officials at the US Food and Drug Administration.</p> <p>In a commentary piece published this week in the medical journal JAMA, the officials make a case for seasonal shots and caution that preparation for this winter's potential surge needs to begin no later than next month.</p> <p>"The timeframe to determine the composition of the COVID-19 vaccine for the 2022-2023 season, to use alongside the seasonal influenza vaccine for administration in the Northern Hemisphere beginning in about October, is compressed because of the time required for manufacturing the necessary doses," the officials write. "A decision on composition will need to be made in the US by June 2022."</p> <p>The piece was written by top FDA vaccine regulator Peter Marks, FDA Principal Deputy Commissioner Janet Woodcock, and FDA Commissioner Robert Califf.</p> <p>On the one hand, the urgency to prepare for the fall may be prudent. But, it comes well before the data is settled on many aspects of their argument—particularly whether SARS-CoV-2 will become seasonal and whether boosters will be necessary.</p> <p>Uncertainty</p> <p>"The jury is still out as to how seasonal this virus will become," Dr. Mike Ryan, executive director of the World Health Organization's Health Emergencies Programme, said in a press briefing Wednesday. Its transmission dynamics will depend on how well-protected people are (by vaccination and/or prior infection) at any given time, what variant is spreading, and how people behave, such as crowding indoors, he explained. However, he did note that it's reasonable to assume that the virus will transmit more readily when people are close together indoors.</p> <p>In the case of more transmission this fall, it's still unclear if additional boosters are necessary, as Katherine O'Brien, WHO's Director of the Department of Immunization, Vaccines, and Biologicals, noted in the briefing. "We are in a pretty limited space in terms of data," she said. There's little data so far, and what we do have is mainly on mRNA vaccines—which is one of several vaccine platforms used globally—and from high-income countries, such as the US and Israel.</p> <p>That data points to a short-term benefit in terms of hospitalization rates, she said, but the information is limited and not to a point where WHO can recommend future boosters. For now, she said, the agency is</p>

focused on continuing to get primary doses and existing boosters to priority groups—healthcare workers and older adults—in countries worldwide.

New normal

But, the FDA's Marks, Woodcock, and Califf note that there's no time to spare to prepare for the fall, given the lead-time required for manufacturing the doses. In lieu of firm evidence, the FDA will need to rely on available data and predictive modeling that could try to account for waning protection from vaccination and infection and transmission patterns in the winter. The upcoming decision will also have to be made "with the understanding that there will be some inherent residual uncertainty about the further evolution of SARS-CoV-2," they write.

That uncertainty is already looming large over the upcoming decision. Omicron subvariants continue to evolve rapidly, demonstrating newfound abilities to evade omicron-based immune responses that have developed in the past few months. The viruses' evolution raises concern that any omicron-based vaccines designed this summer may already be outdated by the fall.

Still, the FDA appears to have its sights on an omicron-based booster. "To date, the original, or prototype, vaccine composition deployed has been reasonably good at protecting against severe outcomes from COVID-19," the officials write. "However, a greater depth and duration of protection might be achieved with a vaccine covering currently circulating variants."

Whatever vaccine formulation is chosen, fall boosters will offer a chance to increase population-level protection, they argue. And, with the plan in motion, "society is moving toward a new normal that may well include annual COVID-19 vaccination alongside seasonal influenza vaccination."

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HEADLINE	05/04 Farming next front in Russia war
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220504-farming-the-next-front-in-russia-s-war-on-ukraine
GIST	<p>Billboards along the highway in Zaporizhzhia city say, “Russian warship go F*#@ yourself!” and “Put your Molotov cocktail here,” with drawings of red arrows pointing to sensitive spots on Russian tanks.</p> <p>In the Zaporizhzhia countryside, wheat fields are nestled along the front lines and farmers wear body armor issued by the Ukrainian military as they work. The remnants of missiles are often found in these fields, farmers say, with recent attacks as close as next door.</p> <p>“If the soldiers are the front line of this war, farmers are the second line,” said Vitaliy Lupynos, the owner of some 20 square kilometers of local farmland, where peas, barley, rapeseed and wheat grow. “We are feeding the country and the army.”</p> <p>More than eight weeks into the war, Lupynos says, even a greatly reduced crop is not certain, with fewer than two months to harvest. In Zaporizhzhia Oblast, 85% of the farmland is now occupied by Russia and many farm workers remaining in Ukrainian-controlled lands have left the fields to join the army.</p> <p>The region, one of Ukraine’s key food producers, usually generates an estimated 2.7 million tons of wheat. This year, farmers anticipate roughly 260,000 tons, if nothing else goes wrong.</p> <p>But attacks in the city of Zaporizhzhia have become more frequent since Russia announced it would focus its efforts on eastern Ukraine after failing to take the capital, Kyiv. Farmers say they fear they could lose the entire oblast any day.</p> <p>“We can’t tell what will happen tomorrow,” Lupynos said.</p> <p>“It’s high stakes: like playing Russian roulette,” said Lupynos, referring to the deadly game of chance. “If Russian occupiers come here, they could take our lands. They could ruin the fields.”</p>

Hungry World

In recent months, food shortages resulting from the war in Ukraine have circled the globe, with price hikes of 20% to 50% for ordinary bread reported from Brazil to Pakistan and Egypt.

Ukraine and Russia are among the world's most important food exporters, providing more than a quarter of the world's wheat supply, along with other important crops such as corn, sunflower seed oil and barley.

The United Nations said the ongoing global food crisis is growing rapidly as a result of the war, with no sign it will slow down any time soon. The poor in many places are becoming destitute, and the hungry are starving. In vulnerable and war-torn countries like Yemen, Ethiopia and Afghanistan, the war in Ukraine has set off a chain of events that could lead to widescale famine as more than half the World Food Program's (WFP's) wheat supply comes from Ukraine alone.

"The bullets and bombs in Ukraine could take the global hunger crisis to levels beyond anything we've seen before," said WFP Executive Director David Beasley in a statement last month.

Beyond hunger, the world now faces shortages of fuel, fertilizer and other farming necessities because of the war, and the U.N. has warned the growing scarcity could lead to civil unrest and increased global insecurity.

These warnings have done little to slow what appears to be pending disaster, according to Ukrainian officials. There is wheat in Ukraine waiting to be exported, but major ports are all closed due to attacks and most land routes are either unavailable or unsuitable.

"We are ready to sell," said Olexandr Iasynytskyi, head of Zaporizhzhia's regional agricultural department. "But we don't have transportation. We are trying to figure it out."

After the Harvest

Even if they find a way to mitigate the crisis by getting this year's harvest to market, Iasynytskyi said, next year's harvest is already in greater danger.

While Ukraine's exports are stuck in place, its limited expected crops should be enough to feed civilians and soldiers for the present, according to farmers and officials. Without export sales, they say, it's not clear how they will be able to plant next season.

"Farmers do not have enough capital right now to invest in future crops," said Iasynytskyi, the regional agriculture chief. "They have grain but they cannot sell it. How can they operate without money?" Banks are offering limited loans, he added, but martial law has made lenders cautious and potential investors scatter.

Farms controlled by Russia within territorial Ukraine are expected to operate this year, but it's not clear where the food will go, or how much there will be, Iasynytskyi said. It is believed the "occupied" farms are short of supplies and cash but information is limited as many areas under Russian control are without access to mobile networks or internet.

On the Ukrainian side of the war zone, farmers said if their plots are taken, they are not sure they will continue to work, for fear their crops will feed Russia's war machine.

"I will never work for Russia," said Roman Umarov, 30, an agricultural engineer overseeing the spread of insecticide on a Zaporizhzhia farm last week. "But I imagine it's not always a choice. What if they put a gun to your head?"

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HEADLINE	05/04 Guesswork grows over Putin Ukraine goals
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/world/europe/ukraine-russia-putin-victory-day.html

With the Russian military still struggling, Western officials and Ukraine's traumatized residents are looking with increased alarm to Russia's Victory Day holiday on May 9 — a celebration of the Soviet triumph over Nazi Germany — fearing that President Vladimir V. Putin may exploit it as a grandiose stage to intensify attacks and mobilize his citizenry for all-out war.

While Russia has inflicted death and destruction across Ukraine and made some progress in the east and the south over the past 10 weeks, stiff Ukrainian resistance, heavy weapons supplied by the West and Russian military incompetence have denied Mr. Putin the swift victory he originally appeared to have anticipated, including the initial goal of decapitating the government in Kyiv.

Now, however, with Russia about to be smacked with a [European Union oil embargo](#), and with Victory Day just five days away, Mr. Putin may see the need to jolt the West with a new escalation. Anxiety is growing that Mr. Putin will use the event, when he traditionally presides over a parade and gives a militaristic speech, to lash out at Russia's perceived enemies and expand the scope of the conflict.

In a sign of those concerns, Ben Wallace, the British defense secretary, predicted last week that Mr. Putin would use the occasion to redefine what the Russian leader has called a "special military operation" into a war, calling for a mass mobilization of the Russian people.

Such a declaration would present a new challenge to war-battered Ukraine, as well as to Washington and its NATO allies as they try to counter Russian aggression without entangling themselves directly in the conflict. However, the Kremlin on Wednesday denied that Mr. Putin would declare war on May 9, calling it "nonsense," and Russia analysts noted that announcing a military draft could provoke a domestic backlash.

Still, Russia's hierarchy also denied for months that it had intended to invade Ukraine, only to do exactly that on Feb. 24. So the conjecture over Mr. Putin's intent on Victory Day is only growing more acute.

"This is a question that everybody is asking," Valery Dzutsati, a visiting assistant professor at the [Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies](#) at the University of Kansas, said on Wednesday, adding that the "short answer is nobody knows what is going to happen on May 9."

Professor Dzutsati said that declaring a mass mobilization or an all-out war could prove deeply unpopular among Russians. He predicted that Mr. Putin would take "the safest possible option" and point to the territory Russia has already seized in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine to declare a "preliminary victory."

Preparations for May 9 are well underway in Russia, as the country gets set to commemorate the 77th anniversary of the Soviet Army's victory over the Nazis while it fights another war against what Mr. Putin claims, falsely, are modern-day Nazis running Ukraine.

On Wednesday, Russian state media reported that warplanes and helicopters practiced flying in formations over Moscow's Red Square — a show of military might that included eight MiG-29 jets flying in the shape of the letter "Z," which has become a [ubiquitous symbol](#) of Russian nationalism and support for the war.

Other warplanes streaked over Moscow while releasing trails of white, blue and red — the colors of the Russian flag.

Russia's defense minister, Sergei K. Shoigu, said on Wednesday that military parades on May 9 would take place in 28 Russian cities and involve about 65,000 personnel and more than 460 aircraft.

Ukraine warned that Russia was also planning to hold May 9 events in occupied Ukrainian cities, including the devastated southern port of Mariupol, where Ukrainian officials say more than 20,000 civilians have been killed and those who remain have been struggling to survive without adequate food, heat and water.

Ukraine's defense intelligence agency said that Russians were cleaning Mariupol's central streets of corpses and debris in an effort to make the city presentable as "the center of celebrations."

Ukrainian civilians who have been hammered by weeks of Russian strikes are increasingly fearful that Russia could use Victory Day to subject them to even more deadly attacks.

In the western city of Lviv, which lost electricity on Wednesday after Russian missiles struck power stations, Yurji Horal, 43, a government office manager, said that he was planning to go with his wife and young children to stay with relatives in a village about 40 miles away to escape what he feared could be an expansion of the war on May 9.

"I'm worried about them — and about myself," he said. "A lot of people I know are talking about it."

In years past, Mr. Putin has used May 9 — a near-sacred holiday for Russians, since 27 million Soviets died in World War II — to mobilize the nation for the possibility of a new battle ahead.

When he addressed the nation from his rostrum at Red Square on May 9 of last year, he warned that Russia's enemies were once again deploying "much of the ideology of the Nazis."

Now, with Russian state media portraying the fight in Ukraine as the unfinished business of World War II, it seems almost certain that Mr. Putin will use his May 9 speech to evoke the heroism of Soviet soldiers to try to inspire Russians to make new sacrifices.

But a mass mobilization — potentially involving a military draft and a ban on Russian men of military age leaving the country — could bring the reality of war home to a much greater swath of Russian society, provoking unrest.

For many Russians, the "special military operation" in Ukraine still feels like a faraway conflict. The independent pollster Levada [found](#) last month that 39 percent of Russians were paying little to no attention to it.

"When you're watching it on TV, it's one thing," Andrei Kortunov, director general of the Russian International Affairs Council, a research organization close to the Russian government, said in a phone interview from Moscow. "When you're getting a notice from the enlistment office, it's another. There would probably be certain difficulties for the leadership in making such a decision."

Mr. Kortunov predicted that the fighting in eastern Ukraine would eventually grind to a standstill, at which point Russia and Ukraine could negotiate a deal — or rearm and regroup for a new stage of the war.

He noted that while some senior Russian officials and state television commentators have been calling for the destruction of Ukraine, Mr. Putin has been more vague recently in his war aims, at least in public comments.

Mr. Kortunov said Mr. Putin could still declare the mission accomplished once Russia captured most of the Donbas region. Russia has expanded its control of that region significantly since the start of the war, but Ukraine still holds several key cities and towns.

"If everything ends with the Donbas, there would probably be a way to explain that this was always the plan," Mr. Kortunov said. "Putin has left that option open for himself."

With no resolution to the conflict in sight, the European Union on Wednesday took a major step intended to weaken Mr. Putin's ability to finance the war, proposing a total embargo on Russian oil. The measure, expected to win final approval in a few days, would ban Russian crude oil imports to nearly all of the European Union in the next six months, and prohibit refined oil products by year's end.

	<p>“Let us be clear, it will not be easy,” Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, told the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, where the announcement was greeted with applause. “Some member states are strongly dependent on Russian oil. But we simply have to work on it.”</p> <p>The European Union also promised on Wednesday to provide additional military support for Moldova, a former Soviet republic on Ukraine’s southwest border that Western officials say could be used by Russia as a launchpad for further attacks.</p> <p>Security fears in Moldova swelled last week as mysterious explosions rocked Transnistria, a Kremlin-backed separatist region of the country where Russia has maintained soldiers since 1992.</p> <p>Although European officials said they would “significantly increase” military support for Moldova, delivering additional military equipment, as well as instruments to counter disinformation and cyberattacks, they did not provide details.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 EU takes a leap: Russia oil embargo
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/world/europe/eu-russia-oil-embargo.html
GIST	<p>More than two months into Russia’s brutal war on Ukraine, the European Union on Wednesday announced plans to embargo Russian oil, its biggest economic sacrifice yet to inflict pain on the Russian economy and President Vladimir V. Putin.</p> <p>The measure unveiled by the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, would ban Russian crude oil imports to nearly all of the European Union in the next six months, and refined oil products by the end of the year. The embargo, contained in the sixth round of E.U. sanctions, is expected to win final approval from member countries within days.</p> <p>The move is a landmark moment in the bloc’s support of Ukraine, severing a longstanding link to Russia and accepting a serious economic hardship for Europe, one which many E.U. countries had resisted.</p> <p>Their agreement, like the growing supply of weapons to Ukraine, reflects the hardening of Western opposition to Mr. Putin’s invasion of his neighbor, and a calculation that whatever the price for Europe, the cost to Russia will be higher.</p> <p>“Let us be clear, it will not be easy,” Ms. von der Leyen told the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, where the announcement was greeted with applause. “Some member states are strongly dependent on Russian oil. But we simply have to work on it.”</p> <p>Europe depends heavily on Russian fossil fuels, the main source of revenue that has allowed Moscow to build up its military. The E.U. gets about 27 percent of its crude oil imports from Russia and a higher share of its oil products, paying billions of dollars a month.</p> <p>Diplomats who have seen the proposed sanctions documents, which have not been made public, said that Hungary and Slovakia would be given until December 2023 to ban Russian oil, and more concessions could be made before the embargo was finalized. Those two countries, with outsized dependence on such imports, make up a small fraction of E.U. Russian oil imports.</p> <p>The phased approach to the embargo reflects how hard — and expensive — European officials expect it will be to find alternatives to Russian oil imports.</p> <p>The European Union last month banned Russian coal, a fuel that was already getting phased out. Banning Russian natural gas, which most E.U. countries rely on for heating and electricity, has been considered unrealistic in the immediate future, but the bloc has laid out plans to gradually wean itself off it in the coming years.</p>

Talks to finalize the embargo are expected to go until the end of the week, and some details could change. Hungary, in addition to securing more time to cut off Russian oil, said it would seek still more exemptions, while other countries have taken issue with narrow elements of the proposals that would affect them.

The new sanctions plan would also prohibit E.U.-owned shipping companies from transporting Russian oil to destinations outside the bloc, and target the brokering and insurance firms, overwhelmingly based in the European Union and Britain, that help make that shipping possible.

Those steps would deal a serious blow to Moscow's oil exports that could reverberate far beyond Europe. Much of Russia's oil is carried by European-owned tankers, in particular Greek-owned ones. Industry research shows that in the weeks after the invasion of Ukraine, Greek tankers carried half or more of Russia's oil exports to international destinations.

Oil prices rose sharply after Ms. von der Leyen spoke on Wednesday morning, with Brent crude, the international benchmark, shooting up by 3.7 percent, to \$108.88 a barrel.

E.U. officials said they were eager to have the embargo formalized by May 9, the day Russia commemorates the victory of the Soviet Red Army over Nazi Germany. Western officials have speculated that Mr. Putin could use the anniversary to make a dramatic announcement in relation to his war in Ukraine.

The new E.U. sanctions package includes penalties against Sberbank, Russia's biggest bank, Ms. von der Leyen said.

In a highly symbolic move, it would add Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, to the list of sanctioned people and entities, according to diplomats who have reviewed the measures but were not authorized to speak publicly.

The patriarch has proved a divisive figure throughout the war for his unalloyed support of the Kremlin, with critics saying that he has taken his directions from President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia rather than worked to end the fighting. Many victims of the war are members of his flock — though the Ukrainian Orthodox Church broke away from Moscow's jurisdiction, millions of people in eastern Ukraine, where the fighting is concentrated, remain under the Russian church.

Patriarch Kirill has given a golden icon to a senior Russian military commander as a blessing for the troops, and has said that the Russian army was battling the "Antichrist," prompting some Orthodox parishes and other institutions outside Russia but under Moscow's umbrella to break away.

In addition to moving to tighten sanctions, the European Union on Wednesday also promised additional military support for Moldova, the increasingly pressured neighbor of both the bloc and Ukraine.

Moldova has a Russia-backed breakaway region, Transnistria, a thin sliver of land where 10,000 or more Russian troops are stationed, and Moldovan officials worry that Russia could drag their country could be dragged into the war. A Russian general recently claimed that Moscow would seize a land bridge along the Black Sea coast, linking Transnistria to Russia.

Moldovan security fears swelled last week as a series of mysterious explosions rocked Transnistria.

No one claimed responsibility for the attacks, with Russian, Ukrainian and Transnistrian authorities trading accusations, but the explosions exacerbated Moldova's war jitters.

Charles Michel, the president of the European Council, the body that brings together the leaders of the 27 E.U. countries, said the bloc would "significantly increase" its military support for Moldova.

Moldova, a former Soviet republic with a Romanian-speaking majority, is extremely vulnerable militarily, with only 6,000 troops and a constitutional ban on joining any military alliances, including NATO. In an

	<p>attempt to step out of Russia's long shadow, the Moldovan government formally applied in March to join the European Union, but any prospect of membership is years away.</p> <p>Transnistria lies only 25 miles from Odesa, Ukraine's chief port, which appears to be a major target in Moscow's military campaign. The Ukrainian military announced last week that it was moving more troops to the border in response to rising tensions in Transnistria and to a Russian missile strike on a bridge that connects the area around Odesa to the rest of Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Expansion fear: Russia late-night airstrikes
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/4/russia-carries-out-late-night-airstrikes-fears-mou/
GIST	<p>Russian forces pounded cities in central Ukraine on Wednesday night, capping a day of mounting concern among Western leaders that Moscow is preparing to ramp up its attacks and may even formally declare all-out war against Ukraine when Russia holds its annual Victory Day celebrations early next week.</p> <p>While a top Kremlin spokesman called such speculation “nonsense” on Wednesday, Russia's defense chief suggested Moscow is poised to dramatically expand missile strikes on areas of Ukraine that it believes are being used by the U.S. and NATO allies to channel increasingly powerful and sophisticated weapons to the Ukrainian military.</p> <p>“Any NATO transports carrying weapons or resources for the Ukrainian military that arrives in the country's territory will be seen by us as a legitimate target to be destroyed,” Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said in published remarks that denounced the West for “stuffing Ukraine with weapons.”</p> <p>Washington and its Western allies accelerated weapons shipments into Ukraine while scrambling to increase economic pressure on Moscow as Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion grinds violently through its third month.</p> <p>The prospect of a Ukraine-Russia cease-fire appears increasingly dim. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Wednesday that his government will not accept any deal that would allow Russian troops to remain in their current positions, occupying Ukrainian territory in the divided Donbas region.</p> <p>Before invading Ukraine, Russia controlled an eastern slice of the country's territory in support of pro-Moscow separatist forces there, as well as in the Crimean Peninsula, which Mr. Putin forcibly annexed from Ukraine in 2014.</p> <p>Although it remains to be seen whether the Zelenskyy government may be willing to negotiate over Crimea, the Ukrainian president told participants in the Wall Street Journal CEO Council Summit on Wednesday that Ukraine “will not accept a frozen conflict.”</p> <p>Ukrainian forces halted the Russian offensive targeting Kyiv and other major cities in what Mr. Zelenskyy described as the first stage of the conflict. In the second stage, he said, Ukraine would expel Russian troops from its territory. In the third, it would move to fully restore its territorial integrity.</p> <p>Western Europe, which depends heavily on Russia for energy, inched closer to imposing a collective embargo on Russian oil. Exports to Western markets such as Germany, Italy and the Netherlands represent a crucial revenue source for the Russian economy and the Putin government.</p> <p>Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Union's executive arm, proposed having EU countries phase out all imports of Russian crude within six months and refined products by the end of the year. “We will make sure that we phase out Russian oil in an orderly fashion, in a way that allows us and our partners to secure alternative supply routes and minimizes the impact on global markets,” she said in remarks to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France.</p>

The proposals must be unanimously approved to take effect and are likely to be the subject of fierce debate. Ms. von der Leyen conceded that getting all 27 EU member countries — some of them landlocked and highly dependent on Russia for energy supplies — to agree on oil sanctions “will not be easy.”

U.S. officials, meanwhile, prepared for a renewed diplomatic push against Russia at the United Nations. The U.S. took over the rotating monthly presidency of the U.N. Security Council on Sunday. The Biden administration has signaled plans to hold a slate of Security Council meetings on Ukraine over the coming days and weeks. The first is slated for Thursday.

Concerns over the prospect of a dramatic uptick in Russia’s war are likely to be vented during the meeting, scheduled just days before Moscow’s highly anticipated Victory Day celebrations. Analysts say Russian forces in recent days have focused heavily on undermining Ukraine’s defense establishment and Kyiv’s ability to resupply troops in the fighting.

According to Foreign Policy.com, Russian artillery fire in recent days has targeted or taken out an anti-ship missile facility near Kyiv, a Malyshev tank factory in Kharkiv, and major industrial complexes in the cities of Kharkiv, Mariupol and Mykolaiv.

‘Victory Day’ in Russia

The Kremlin pushed ahead with preparations for a major parade showing off the country’s military might, even as Russian forces appear to have stalled and struggled to regroup in Ukraine during recent weeks.

The Russian Defense Ministry said this week it will send 77 combat aircraft into the skies over Moscow’s Red Square on Monday to commemorate the 77th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in what Russians refer to as the “Great Patriotic War.”

The Moscow parade is one of 28 military commemorations scheduled throughout Russia. Mr. Shoigu told Tass, the Russian news agency, that about 65,000 troops, 2,400 weapon systems and more than 460 aircraft will take part. While significant, the size of this year’s main parade in Moscow is reported to be notably smaller than past commemorations, a reflection of the heavy losses of men and hardware Russian forces have experienced in the Ukraine fighting.

Still, the drain of the war won’t stop the party. Tass reported that an Ilyushin Il-80 “doomsday” strategic command post has already flown over Moscow during dress rehearsals this week, escorted by at least two MiG-29 fighters.

Other long-range bombers, including the MiG-31 and MiG-31BM, also have reportedly taken to the skies over the Russian capital. Fighter pilots flew over Red Square in a tight formation resembling the letter Z, which has come to symbolize the Russian public’s support for the country’s troops fighting in Ukraine.

Western analysts have speculated that Mr. Putin is planning a major military or diplomatic announcement on Ukraine tied to the May 9 celebrations, including perhaps an official declaration of war or the possible formal annexation of breakaway enclaves in the eastern Donbas region. But the Kremlin on Wednesday denied any plans for a bombshell announcement tied to what the Putin government still refers to officially as a “special military operation” in Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov specifically batted down talk of a formal declaration of war, telling reporters “there is no chance of that — it’s nonsense.”

Late-night airstrikes

Air raid sirens sounded in cities across Ukraine on Wednesday night, and missile fire followed shortly afterward in the cities of Cherkasy, Dnipro and Zaporizhzhia south of Kyiv.

In Dnipro, Mayor Borys Filatov said one strike hit the center of the city. The strikes in Dnipro hit a railroad facility, authorities initially said, without elaborating. Ukrainian Railways said none of its staff was injured in the Dnipro attack.

The Associated Press reported that it had analyzed new satellite imagery that suggested fighting may also be ongoing at a besieged Azovstal steel plant in the southern port city of Mariupol. The Kremlin had denied Russian forces are trying to storm the plant, the last remaining holdout of Ukrainian fighters in the city.

In other diplomatic developments Wednesday, Bulgaria's parliament approved a measure to increase aid to Ukraine after a debate that rattled the country's governing coalition. The proposal, introduced by the centrist party of Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov, was supported by 200 legislators. Sixteen were against, one abstained, and 23 were not present.

The pro-Russia Socialist Party had threatened to quit the governing coalition if the aid was approved. The vote took place only after Mr. Zelenskyy sent a letter to the Bulgarian parliament. Instead of weapons deliveries, he reportedly asked for damaged Ukrainian military equipment to be repaired at Bulgarian plants and sent back.

British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace, meanwhile, reaffirmed his country's strong support for Finland and Sweden to join NATO. Finland and Sweden are expected to announce next week whether to seek membership in the 30-nation alliance.

"I cannot conceive that we would not come to support [their membership]," Mr. Wallace told reporters. "We will do whatever we need to do." He added that Finland is "in a pole position" to join NATO and that the British Parliament would be able to ratify a Finnish membership quickly.

The British defense secretary was among a clutch of officials who observed a military exercise in western Finland on Wednesday involving troops from the United Kingdom, Latvia, the United States and Estonia.

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HEADLINE	05/05 Day 71 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/05/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-71-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ukrainian forces are fighting “difficult bloody battles” against Russian troops inside the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol, Reuters reported, citing a Telegram video message from the commander of the Azov battalion. A Ukrainian official said on Wednesday that Russian forces entered the steelworks where the city's last resistance has been holding out but contact remained with the defenders.• Another 344 people have been rescued from the besieged city of Mariupol in a second evacuation operation, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has confirmed a national address.• Russia has said it will implement a daytime ceasefire for three days from Thursday to allow more civilian evacuations from the Azovstal plant. “The Russian armed forces will from 8 am to 6 pm (Moscow time) on 5-7 May open a humanitarian corridor from the territory of the Azovstal metallurgical plant to evacuate civilians,” the defence ministry said.• The UK is providing £45m in funding to help the most vulnerable in Ukraine and at its borders, the government has said. The money will go to UN agencies and charities delivering vital aid and supporting survivors of sexual violence in the war-torn nation, PA Media reports.• Joe Biden said he would speak with other G7 leaders this week about potential additional sanctions against Russia. His treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, said the US was in constant discussions with its partners about this.• The United States has provided intelligence that has helped Ukrainian forces kill many of the Russian generals who have died in the Ukraine war, the New York Times reported on Wednesday, citing senior US officials. Washington has reportedly provided to Ukraine details on

Russia's expected troop movements and the location and other details about Russia's mobile military headquarters.

- **Volodymyr Zelenskiy said he believed Ukraine would again see peace despite Russia's war but warned that what happens in Ukraine will have important consequences for the rest of Europe.** Addressing the people of Denmark on the 77th anniversary of their liberation from Nazi occupation, he said: "I do believe our day of liberation is coming close."
- **Russia has practised simulated nuclear-capable missile strikes in the western enclave of Kaliningrad,** sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania along the Baltic coast. Forces rehearsed simulated "electronic launches" of nuclear-capable Iskander mobile ballistic missile systems, the defence ministry said.
- **Sweden has received assurances from the US that it would receive support during the period a potential application to join Nato is processed** by the 30 nations in the alliance, the Swedish foreign minister, Ann Linde, [said in Washington](#).
- **Brazilian presidential frontrunner Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has said Zelenskiy and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, bear equal responsibility for the war,** putting the leftist candidate [at odds with western powers](#).
- **The bodies of 20 more civilians were found in the past 24 hours in the Kyiv region, according to Kyiv's regional police chief, Andriy Nebytov.** The latest discoveries, in the town of Borodianka and the surrounding villages, [raise the total number of civilian bodies found in the region to 1,235](#).
- **The European Union is proposing to ban all Russian oil imports in a sixth package of sanctions.** The European Commission's president, Ursula von der Leyen, said [Putin had to pay a "high price for his brutal aggression"](#) in Ukraine. Hungary's international relations minister, Zoltán Kovács, [said his country would veto the EU proposal](#).
- **As many as 600 people were killed in the Russian bombing of a theatre in Mariupol in March,** according to an investigation by the Associated Press. Based on the accounts of nearly two dozen survivors, rescuers, and people familiar with the theatre, AP [found evidence that the attack was twice deadlier than estimated](#).
- **The head of the Russian Orthodox church, Patriarch Kirill, is reportedly on the draft blacklist of the EU's next round of sanctions.** An EU document claims [Kirill has been "one of the most prominent supporters of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine"](#) and a key player in amplifying Vladimir Putin's rhetoric on Ukraine.
- **Ukraine has accused Russia of planning to hold a Victory Day military parade in the captured city of Mariupol on 9 May to celebrate victory over the Nazis in the second world war.** Ukraine's military intelligence said [an official from Russia's presidential administration had arrived in Mariupol to oversee plans for the parade](#).
- **The Kremlin dismissed speculation that it will declare all-out war in Ukraine in the coming days as "nonsense"** amid speculation from western officials that President Vladimir Putin could use the 9 May Victory Parade to announce an escalation of military action. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said there was no truth to the rumours "at all".
- **Britain has banned all export of services to Russia as part of new sanctions against 63 individuals and organisations.** The measures, announced by the foreign secretary, Liz Truss, would [cut off Russia's access to the UK's accounting, management consulting, and PR services](#). However, it is understood that [the measures will not affect the legal profession or some other sectors](#) such as software development and cloud internet services.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Sweden: US offers guarantees if join NATO
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/04/sweden-says-us-has-offered-security-guarantees-if-it-applies-to-join-nato
GIST	Sweden has received assurances from the US that it would receive support during the period a potential application to join Nato is processed by the 30 nations in the alliance, foreign minister Ann Linde said in Washington on Wednesday.

Sweden and neighbour Finland stayed out of Nato during the cold war, but Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its invasion of Ukraine have led the countries to rethink their security policies, with Nato membership looking increasingly likely.

Both countries are concerned they would be vulnerable during an application process, which could take up to a year to be approved by all Nato's members.

"Naturally, I'm not going to go into any details, but I feel very sure that now we have an American assurance," Linde told Swedish TV from Washington after meeting US secretary of state Antony Blinken.

"However, not concrete security guarantees, those you can only get if you are a full member of Nato," she added.

Linde declined to say what assurances she had received from Blinken.

"They would mean that Russia can be clear that if they direct any kind of negative activities against Sweden, which they have threatened, it would not be something that the US would just allow to happen ... without a response," she said.

Sweden's defence minister said last month that an application could trigger a number of responses from Russia, including cyber-attacks and hybrid measures – like propaganda campaigns – to undermine Sweden's security.

Moscow has warned it could deploy nuclear weapons and hypersonic missiles in the European exclave of Kaliningrad if Sweden and Finland become Nato members.

Linde, who will now travel to Canada to discuss security matters with its government, said the US was strongly supportive of Swedish and Finnish membership in Nato, which would increase stability in the Baltic and Arctic regions.

Both Sweden and Finland are expected to make a decision about whether to apply to join Nato this month.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Fierce fighting in Mariupol Azovstal plant
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/04/contact-lost-ukraine-troops-staging-last-stand-mariupol
GIST	<p>Fierce fighting has continued inside Mariupol's Azovstal steelworks, the commander of Ukrainian forces in the plant said, as more civilians fled the city on evacuation buses following weeks of brutal bombardment that have reduced much of it to rubble.</p> <p>Ukrainian forces were fighting "difficult bloody battles" against Russian troops for a second day, Denys Prokopenko, commander of the Azov regiment, said in a brief video released on Telegram late on Wednesday.</p> <p>"I am proud of my soldiers who are making superhuman efforts to contain the pressure of the enemy ... the situation is extremely difficult," commander Denis Prokopenko said.</p> <p>Earlier on Wednesday, David Arakhamia, the head of Ukraine's ruling party in parliament, told RFE/RL that Russian forces had entered the plant, but he said that the country's government remained in contact with the Ukrainian troops staging a last stand.</p> <p>Ukraine claimed on Thursday that it has regained control over several settlements surrounding Mykolayiv and Kherson in the country's south, military officials have said.</p>

Due to the successful actions of Ukrainian defenders, Russian forces “lost control over several settlements on the border of Mykolayiv and Kherson regions”, the latest intelligence report from Ukraine’s general staff of the armed forces read.

The Kremlin’s official spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, denied reports that Moscow’s forces were trying to storm the Azovstal plant. “The order was publicly given by [Vladimir Putin] to cancel the storming,” Peskov said. “There is no storming.”

Russia said its forces would cease firing at the factory on Thursday morning, and open a three-day humanitarian corridor for any civilians.

“The Russian armed forces will from 8am to 6pm (Moscow time, 0500 GMT to 1500 GMT) on May 5, 6 and 7 open a humanitarian corridor from the territory of the Azovstal metallurgical plant to evacuate civilians,” the defence ministry said.

“During this period, the Russian armed forces and formations of the Donetsk People’s Republic will unilaterally cease any hostilities.”

The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said in a national address on Wednesday night that another 344 people had been rescued from the centre of Mariupol and its suburbs on Wednesday.

Zelenskiy said negotiations continued to rescue people trapped in the Azovstal steel works. “There are still civilians. Women, children,” he added.

It is not known whether any of the civilians trapped in the works, where about 200 people – including 30 - children – remain, were among those who got out on Wednesday..

On Tuesday, the Ukrainian MP Kira Rudik said 156 people had managed to leave Mariupol and reach the relative safety of Zaporizhzhia, 140 miles (230km) away, after at least 20 failed attempts to evacuate civilians from the Azovstal site.

She told Sky News the main goal of aid workers “is to make sure we get out all the children”, adding: “It’s about 30 children who are still there. The most complicated step would be with the wounded soldiers, because Russia is not allowing them to get out.”

Russia’s defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, said the remaining Ukrainian forces in the plant were “securely blocked along the entire perimeter”. He claimed repeated proposals to “release civilians and lay down their arms” had been ignored.

Ukraine on Wednesday accused Moscow of planning to stage a military parade in Mariupol on 9 May, when Russia traditionally celebrates its victory over the Nazis in the second world war with processions in dozens of cities.

“Mariupol will become a centre of ‘celebration’,” Ukraine’s military intelligence said in a statement on social media. “The central streets of the city are urgently being cleaned of debris, bodies and unexploded ordnance.”

It said an official from Russia’s presidential administration had already arrived in the city, now almost entirely under Russian control, for a “large-scale propaganda campaign. Russians will be shown stories of locals’ ‘joy’ at meeting the occupiers.”

Azovstal evacuees who arrived in Zaporizhzhia were emotional. “We are so thankful for everyone who helped. There was a moment we lost hope, we thought everyone forgot about us,” said Anna Zaitseva, holding her six-month-old baby.

Elyna Tsybulchenko, 54, said Russian forces “bombed like every second”. “Everything shook. Dogs barked and children screamed,” she told Agence France-Presse. “The hardest moment was when we were told our bunker would not survive a direct hit.”

After failing to capture Kyiv, Moscow has refocused its efforts on gaining full control of Luhansk and Donetsk, which make up the eastern Donbas region, and securing a southern land corridor via Mariupol to occupied Crimea.

Ukraine’s defence ministry said Russia was raising the tempo of its offensive and that it had conducted nearly 50 airstrikes on Tuesday. A ministry spokesperson, Oleksandr Motuzyanyk, said artillery bombardments and airstrikes were also continuing on the Azovstal plant.

On Wednesday both sides reported Russian strikes on key transport infrastructure around the western city of Lviv, near Poland, and in Transcarpathia, bordering Hungary.

There were also fears the conflict could spill over into neighbouring Moldova. The European Council president, Charles Michel, offered the republic the EU’s “full solidarity” and support. “We plan to significantly increase our support to Moldova by providing its armed forces with additional military equipment,” he said during a visit.

Russia’s defence ministry said it had disabled six railway stations in eastern Ukraine used to supply Ukrainian forces with western-made weapons; hit 40 Ukrainian military targets including four ammunition and arms depots; and fired two cruise missiles at military targets from a submarine in the Black Sea.

Moscow had deployed 22 battalion tactical groups near the eastern Ukrainian town of Izium, apparently in a drive to capture the nearby cities of Kramatorsk and Severodonetsk in Donbas, British military intelligence said.

Shoigu said his forces would consider Nato transport units carrying weapons in Ukraine as targets to be destroyed. The alliance has said individual member states are sending military supplies, but not troops.

The defence ministry of neighbouring, pro-Russia Belarus has announced military drills, saying they posed no threat, but Ukraine’s border service said it could not exclude the possibility Belarusian forces might join Russia’s assault. “We are ready,” a spokesperson said.

Ukraine remains defiant. “Russia struggles to advance and suffers terrible losses,” the foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, tweeted. “Thus the desperate missile terror across Ukraine. But we are not afraid and the world should not be afraid either.”

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HEADLINE	05/04 Russian mercenaries link to Mali massacres
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/04/russian-mercenaries-wagner-group-linked-to-civilian-massacres-in-mali
GIST	<p>Russian mercenaries in Africa have been linked to massacres in which several hundred civilians have died, raising new fears about the impact of Moscow’s intensifying interventions on the stability and security of countries across the continent.</p> <p>Western officials have so far largely steered clear of naming the perpetrators of killings but witnesses, local community leaders, diplomats and local analysts blamed many of the deaths on fighters deployed by the Wagner Group, a network of private companies run by a close ally of Vladimir Putin.</p> <p>The incidents have occurred in Mali, the strategic west African country where Wagner arrived last year after striking a deal with its new military rulers.</p>

Internal Malian army documents seen by the Guardian reveal the presence of Wagner members - referred to as “Russian instructors” - on “mixed missions” with Malian soldiers and gendarmes during operations in which many civilians have been killed.

According to data compiled by the NGO [Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project](#) (ACLED), as many as 456 civilians died in nine incidents involving Malian forces and Wagner between January and mid-April this year.

By far the most serious incident occurred in March when the Wagner Group is alleged to have been involved in a massacre in Moura, a village controlled by Islamist extremists, where between 350 and 380 men were killed over a four-day period.

Advertisement

Last week new allegations surfaced about two shootings in villages around the town of Hombori in the central Mopti region, following the death of one or possibly two Wagner mercenaries accompanying Malian troops on operations against Islamist militants.

Aid workers, experts and human rights campaigners said one attack came after a military patrol was ambushed on the outskirts of a village at about 9.30am on 19 April. According to an [internal Malian military memo](#), a “Russian instructor” was injured by an improvised mine and died after being airlifted to the town of Sevare. A medical official in Sevare described the man as a Russian in his 30s.

Following the ambush, Malian soldiers fired on a crowded marketplace.

Mali’s military rulers, who took power in a coup in May last year, have said the Russians in the country are instructors and not deployed in combat roles. The army – sometimes known by the abbreviation FAMA – [has denied a Russian was killed on 19 April](#) and said the casualty was one of their own soldiers. It has also denied killing any civilians and said 18 terrorists had been “neutralised” during “vigorous” security operations.

Another internal memo described a clash on 23 April between militants and “a joint patrol of FAMA and Russian instructors” between the villages of Mondoro and Boni. “Provisional losses” amounted to “two dead – one FAMA and one Russian – and 10 wounded – six FAMA and four Russians”, said the memo, sent some hours after the incident. Details of “enemy losses” were “unavailable for the moment”.

Twelve other people – who may have been extremists – are also thought to have died.

Wagner has been active in a dozen countries across Africa, and it has been repeatedly accused of human rights abuses on the continent. On Tuesday [a Human Rights Watch report alleged](#) that forces in the Central African Republic identified as Russian appear to have killed and tortured civilians since 2019, echoing [similar findings from a group of UN experts last year](#). The group has also taken part in the invasion of Ukraine and [been linked to atrocities there](#).

British officials have expressed concerns at “a significant deterioration in the human rights situation” in Mali in recent months, which they noted coincided with the arrival of between 600 and 1,000 Wagner fighters. “Just as the presence of Russian mercenaries drove an increase in human rights violations and abuses in the Central African Republic in 2021, the same is now being seen in Mali,” one UK diplomat said.

The country’s new rulers hired Wagner for an estimated rate of \$10m a month to be paid both in cash and through rights to extract minerals, experts believe.

The group set up a headquarters near the capital’s international airport in December, satellite photographs [shared by the Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) and flight records reveal, before moving out to forward operating bases across a swath of territory in the centre of Mali in January and February.

Community leaders, diplomats and officials have told the Guardian that Wagner fighters have been seen on joint patrols with Malian armed forces along the restive border with Burkina Faso and Niger, on the western frontier with Mauritania, and also in towns in northern Mali, including Timbuktu.

Pilots supplied by Wagner now fly Malian army helicopters and the group has also provided fighters who have led Malian forces on bigger operations, notably a major push against Islamist insurgents that began in late February.

In early March, more than 30 bodies were found burnt in the town of Niono in central Mali following operations by Malian forces supported by Wagner. Local witnesses accused both Malian and Russian fighters of killing civilians. Many victims had been tied and blindfolded, then shot, according to Human Rights Watch. Malian authorities denied the allegations.

Moura, where the alleged massacre of hundreds took place in March, is a village in an inaccessible swampy area of the floodplain of the Niger River which has been controlled for many years by militants from the al-Qaida-linked Group of Support for Islam and Muslims (GSIM). The extremists have imposed their rigorous and intolerant version of Sharia law on inhabitants, raised taxes and made local men follow their dress codes.

Amadou Barry, who lives in the neighbouring village, told the Guardian he was attending the weekly market in Moura on 27 March when helicopters suddenly appeared and troops disembarked. A small group of Islamist militants in the village shot at the soldiers and then fled on motorbikes.

“All of us started running in every direction, some into the houses. The Malian army then opened fire on people running, killing so many people,” Barry said.

Malian soldiers then marched hundreds of men from the village to a dry river bed nearby for interrogation. The men were held there with little food or water for four days, while soldiers periodically led groups of captives away to be killed, Barry and other witnesses said.

Some villagers were released after their fingers and shoulders were inspected for signs that they had fired guns, but all men from the Peuhl ethnic minority were detained, Barry said.

The GSIM and other extremist Islamist factions have sought to recruit among the pastoralist Peuhl by exploiting grievances with the government and other ethnic groups. According to survivors, those killed in Moura were all from the Peuhl community.

Héni Nsaibia, senior researcher at ACLED, said between 60 and 100 of those killed may have been unarmed Islamist militants, but the rest were civilians. Government forces found large quantities of weapons in Moura.

Several witnesses said the operation was led by white men speaking “a strange language” which some identified as Russian, though most of the soldiers who killed civilians were “Malian people”.

Ousmane Diallo, a researcher for Amnesty International in Mali, said testimony collected from survivors and witnesses confirmed that white soldiers landed in Moura on 27 March in helicopters and stayed for days.

“We know that Wagner are deployed in central Mali, they’ve been assisting operations in lifting and bringing more soldiers to their positions in the region. I think it’s pretty clear that it was Wagner that was conducting this operation,” Diallo said.

Nsaibia said his own exhaustive research among survivors led to a similar conclusion, while a west African diplomat in Mali said “inquiries into the events in Moura had confirmed that Wagner forces were working with Malian forces in central Mali”.

Human Rights Watch, the campaign group, called the incident “the worst single atrocity reported in Mali’s decade-long armed conflict”. The Malian army said it killed 203 militants during a military operation in Moura and denied reports of executions.

Russia vetoed a bid at the United Nations to commission an independent investigation into the massacre, and Mali has blocked efforts by the UN to send a team to Moura. Moscow’s deputy ambassador to the UN said Mali’s authorities did “not have a hidden agenda” and that claims of the involvement of Russian mercenaries in the massacre were part of “a sordid geopolitical game”.

The US and others have alleged that Wagner is funded by the powerful businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, who is closely linked to Putin. Contacted by the Guardian this week Prigozhin denied any knowledge of the group and denied the reports of massacres.

“Any terrorist killed by the Malian army, the collective west tried to pass off as a civilian ... As to the [alleged] atrocities, neither I, nor the men I know, nor the Malian army have committed them,” he said.

Prigozhin accused the Guardian of “fakes, outright lies and ... falsification” and of trying to “spit in the face of me, the Russian patriots, and the Malian people”.

Last week, Islamist extremists from the GSIM claimed to have captured a fighter from Wagner in the Segou region in central Mali.

The GSIM statement said: “These murderous forces participated with the Malian army in an airdrop operation on a market in the village of Moura, where they confronted several mujahideen before ... killing hundreds of innocent civilians.”

Analysts believe the Wagner operative was probably captured in February. Deaths of “three or four” Wagner operatives had been “more or less” confirmed but total casualties were likely to be higher, said Nsaibia.

Islamist militant groups were also responsible for killing large numbers of civilians in indiscriminate attacks and many other human rights abuses, officials and campaigners said. Several attacks by Islamic State in the Greater Sahara around Menaka and in the south near Gao last month led to the deaths of at least 40 civilians and displacement of thousands.

The alleged capture of one of its fighters showed how deeply Wagner had become involved in the conflict in Mali, said Jared Thompson, a research associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “They are now a very direct conflict actor that has skin in the game.”

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HEADLINE	05/04 Baby formula shortage: 40% sold out
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/baby-formula-shortage-brands-sold-out
GIST	<p>A baby formula shortage that’s forcing some stores to limit sales has gotten worse: In 26 states, 40-50% of major formula brands were sold out last week.</p> <p>According to analysis from Datasembly, which tracks pricing and other data for retailers, out-of-stock numbers for baby formula have increased 9 percentage points over a two-week period. For the week of April 24, 40% of major brands are sold out nationwide. In six states — Iowa, South Dakota, Missouri, Texas and Tennessee — more than 50% of formula was sold out, analysts say. In San Antonio, Texas, roughly 57% of major baby formula brands are sold out.</p> <p>Datasembly says the trend started in July 2021 and has continued ever since. In November 2021, 11% of major formula brands were sold out across the U.S. By April of this year, that number had climbed to 31%.</p>

Stores limit baby formula sales

In response to the shortage, some retail chains have put limits on how many [baby formula products](#) you can buy at one time. At Walmart, customers are limited to [five cans](#) per day, and at CVS and Walgreens, you can only buy three products at once.

Target told FOX Television Stations in mid-April that it was "closely monitoring" the shortage, but it hasn't announce in-store purchasing limits. On Target's website, formula sales are capped at four cans.

Kroger has not said whether it has limits on how much baby formula you can buy.

If you're having trouble finding it in stores, check online - and check back often - to see if retailers have what you need online.

What's causing the baby formula shortage?

Supply chain and production issues were already causing a run on baby formula when formula maker Abbott announced a major powdered formula [recall](#) in February. The products - powdered Similac PM, Similac, Ailmentum and Elecare formulas - were linked to several infant hospitalizations, including two deaths, due to a rare bacterial infection.

Abbott told The Wall Street Journal that it's trying to ramp up production at its facilities, but not the one in Michigan where the recalled formulas were made. Investigators concluded that Abbott failed to maintain sanitary conditions at that plant, which led to the deadly bacterial infections.

FDA inspectors visited the same plant in late September 2021 and cited several problems, but none of the problems resulted in a formal FDA warning or requirement that Abbott halt production.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Snohomish Co. hits 'medium' Covid level
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/snohomish-county-hits-medium-covid-19-level
GIST	<p>SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash. - Snohomish County health officials announced that the county has reached "medium" levels of COVID-19.</p> <p>During a briefing on Tuesday, Health Officer Dr. Chris Spitters said cases in the county have been climbing in recent weeks.</p> <p>"Although we may be in a new phase of the pandemic, we are not rid of COVID," Spitters said.</p> <p>As of Tuesday, the Snohomish Health District dashboard said that 32 people with the virus are hospitalized.</p> <p>"If we continue to see hospitalizations increase, we'll find ourselves in a high-risk level with yet another healthcare surge burdening a short-staffed and exhausted healthcare system," Spitters said.</p> <p>The CDC's tool, COVID-19 Community Levels, to help communities decide what prevention steps to take based on the latest data. Levels can be low, medium or high and are determined by looking at hospital beds being used, hospital admissions, and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in an area.</p> <p>The medium level means that there are over 200 new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people over a seven-day period.</p> <p>Spitters recommended an increase in COVID prevention measures for all, which include being up-to-date with COVID vaccinations, boosters, voluntarily mask up indoors, isolate and get tested if you have any symptoms.</p>

	<p>"Masks may not be required in all venues but you can wear them by choice. They're an effective tool for disrupting transmission and masks are most effective when their use is widespread," Spitters said.</p> <p>Last week, King County health officials announced that the county reached the CDC's medium COVID levels.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 India thirsty for cheap Russian oil
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/world/asia/india-russia-oil.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI — One after the next, the entreaties have streamed into India. Buying Russian oil, President Biden told India's prime minister, is not in your country's interest. Undermining sanctions, a U.S. official starkly warned, could bring "consequences." Taking a harder line on Russia, a parade of American and European emissaries argued, is a global imperative.</p> <p>But for India, the decision to hold tight to its neutrality on Russia's war in Ukraine is no longer just about keeping its options open in a world with multiple centers of power. It has evolved into a lucrative case of economic opportunism: Russian oil is just too good a deal to pass up.</p> <p>India's purchases of Russian crude have soared since the conflict's start, rising from nothing in December and January to about 300,000 barrels a day in March and 700,000 a day in April. The crude now accounts for nearly 17 percent of Indian imports, up from less than 1 percent before the invasion. Last year, India imported about 33,000 barrels a day on average from Russia.</p> <p>With Russian oil banned in the United States and Europe now proposing an embargo of its own, India can buy the crude at substantial discounts, powering its energy-thirsty economy at a lower cost. Indian refiners can also use the crude to make products like diesel and jet fuel and sell it at better-than-usual margins abroad.</p> <p>As India leverages the war to help fuel its post-pandemic economic recovery, trade between it and Russia is likely to increase with the conflict dragging on, analysts say. That could further complicate American and European efforts to choke off Russia's economic lifeblood and strain U.S.-Indian relations as the two nations seek to work together to counter China.</p> <p>"If oil is available and at a discount, why shouldn't I buy it? I need it for my people," Nirmala Sitharaman, India's finance minister, said last month.</p> <p>The reshuffling of Russia's oil exports became evident days after President Vladimir V. Putin launched his assault on Ukraine in late February, as tanker traffic that used to head from Russian terminals on the Black Sea to Northern Europe bent instead toward India.</p> <p>That traffic could get busier after the European Union announced on Wednesday that it hoped to phase in a ban on Russian oil in the coming months, a move that came days after Russia cut off gas to Poland and Bulgaria, increasing the possibility of an energy war.</p> <p>The India-bound tankers are heading into Jamnagar, in the western state of Gujarat, where Reliance Industries has the world's largest refinery complex, and into Vadinar, also in Gujarat, the location of a refinery owned by Nayara Energy, an Indian affiliate of Rosneft, the Russian state company.</p> <p>"Northwest Europe demand was obliterated," said Viktor Katona, an analyst at Kpler, a firm that tracks energy shipping. "That has essentially been taken over by India."</p> <p>While Europe may be moving away from crude purchases from Russia, it is eager to buy the same oil after it is refined in India — one of the conundrums in crimping Moscow's energy revenues. India's</p>

exports of diesel and other refined products to Europe, where they are in short supply, reached 219,000 barrels a day, a new high, in March, before falling back in April as demand in India surged.

Simultaneously, India's state-owned oil companies are purchasing millions of barrels of Russian crude for the domestic market, which may have helped Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government avoid a surge in fuel prices after it lifted a freeze in March.

So far, the United States has chosen not to impose tougher sanctions that may force countries like India to stop buying Russian crude. That caution may reflect worries in the Biden administration that such a move could further raise pump prices for Americans.

"The White House seems averse to taking action to close the Indian shelter for homeless Russian barrels," said Helima Croft, head of commodities at RBC Capital Markets, an investment bank, in a note to clients.

It is not hard to understand why Russian oil is attractive to buyers in India and elsewhere, despite the risks of opprobrium over Ukraine. They can obtain substantial discounts of \$30 a barrel or more, a very good deal when Brent crude, the international benchmark, is selling at about \$105 a barrel.

With European countries, as of now, still buying Moscow's oil, top Indian government officials have said it is hypocritical of them to ask India to curtail its trade with Russia. And they have argued that India, a developing country, does not have the luxury to snub discounted energy.

India's trade ties with Russia date to the South Asian country's early days as an independent nation, when it lacked a credit history and a well-established currency. Russia was among only a few traders willing to buy goods from India and accept Indian rupees as payment. With India taking a position of nonalignment through the Cold War, bilateral trade continued, allowing India to build its defense arsenal largely with Russian arms.

Russia has also supplied India with political support at the United Nations. Moscow remained a steady ally when Washington repeatedly angered New Delhi, including by aiding Pakistan, India's enemy, and by imposing sanctions on India for developing nuclear weapons. India has returned the favor by abstaining from U.N. resolutions to condemn the Russian invasion.

Washington is now pitching itself as an alternative defense partner for India, making any threat of sanctions for increased Indian trade with Russia unlikely. India's government has believed it will retain good relations with the United States because of its role as a potentially crucial check on Chinese expansionism.

"It's just a game of chicken at this point," said Samir N. Kapadia, head of trade at Vogel Group, a Washington-based consultancy.

"The problem is India is benefiting not just from the discounted commodities, but now they are finding a growing export market of food and medicine to Russia. I don't see that relationship changing," he said.

Now that Europe is moving to ban Russian crude and fuel, prices are likely to surge, and India could profit even more from refining Russian oil and selling the fuels to Europe.

India itself also has a major appetite for oil. It is the third-largest oil importer and consumer, shipping in more than 80 percent of its crude needs, mainly from countries like Saudi Arabia and Iraq. If Persian Gulf producers find themselves losing Indian market share to Russia, that could create tensions in OPEC Plus, the oil organization chaired by Riyadh and Moscow.

	<p>As Reliance and Nayara, the big Indian refiners, moved toward exports while the Indian government capped fuel prices from November through March, India's state-owned oil companies filled the domestic gap by also importing millions of barrels of Russian crude.</p> <p>But India's absorption of Russian energy products doesn't end there. Imports of Russian coal have also skyrocketed, reaching highs in March not seen in more than two years, according to Kpler data.</p> <p>With economic growth projected to rebound in India to nearly 8 percent this year after the pandemic slump, India is in the market for energy wherever it can get it. One answer will be a new free-trade agreement with Australia, a large producer of coal. Another, India hopes, is talks it is holding with Russia to purchase even more of its coal.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Putin's chemical weapons legacy
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/science/russia-chemical-weapons.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article
GIST	<p>In September 2017, as President Vladimir V. Putin presided over the televised destruction of what he called the last of Russia's chemical arms, he hailed their elimination as "a huge step towards making the modern world more balanced and safe."</p> <p>Now, years later, President Biden and Western leaders are warning that Russia may carry out chemical strikes in Ukraine. No hard evidence has emerged of chemical arms deployed in or near the theater of combat, in contrast to the Russian leader's clearer nuclear warnings. Analysts nonetheless see the threat of chemical warfare as real because Mr. Putin has long shown a willingness to ignore the international ban on chemical weapons. This helps him create an atmosphere of toxic intimidation, they say, that may give Russia a battlefield edge without ever having to fire a shot.</p> <p>"He's already scaring people," said Hanna Notte, an expert on Russia's use of chemical arms at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, Calif. The wide apprehension, experts noted, is prompting the West to provide Kyiv with gear and training meant to thwart any chemical strikes.</p> <p>"It's a war of narratives," Nikolai Sokov, a former Soviet diplomat who negotiated arms-control treaties, said of Ukraine and Russia, which have each accused the other of preparing for chemical warfare. He added that they "blame each other, so there's definitely an attempt at scoring points in an information war."</p> <p>Concerns about chemical warfare were raised on April 11 when the Azov Regiment, a Ukrainian military unit in the besieged city of Mariupol, reported that a Russian drone had dropped a "poisonous substance" into the sprawling steel mill where the defenders had taken refuge. The victims were said to have suffered dizziness, respiratory pain and eye inflammation. The claims made in a video released by the regiment remain unverified.</p> <p>"I saw a fog," a supine man with tightly shut eyes said in the video. "It was very difficult to breathe." He said his legs grew weak. "Felt very bad," the man said between labored breaths.</p> <p>The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, based in The Hague, said it was "monitoring closely the situation in Ukraine" and was investigating the reported attack.</p> <p>Chemical weapons are relatively cheap and easy to make compared with biological and nuclear arms. But modest amounts can result in mass casualties. Military textbooks show victims covered in burns and giant blisters. The eyes, nose and lungs — organs easily in contact with the air or aerosolized toxins — are especially vulnerable.</p>

“The weapons terrify people and generate panic,” said Leiv K. Sydnnes, a chemist at the University of Bergen in Norway who has advised the treaty organization. “The military purpose is to undermine the trust of soldiers and civilians in their shelters, fortifications and hiding places.”

After the Cold War, a global treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, outlawed the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical arms. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons polices the treaty from The Hague and relies on a global network of laboratories to study field samples for signs of outlawed usage. The organization has 193 member states, all signatories of the treaty.

When Russia signed the convention in 1993, it declared that it held more than 40,000 tons of chemical weapons — the world’s largest such arsenal. Its munitions included mustard gas, which burns the eyes and lungs, as well as a variety of nerve agents.

Unlike Russia’s nuclear arms and the military doctrine for their use, Moscow after the Cold War never ran chemical war games and field exercises. But some experts hold that smaller-scale uses of chemical agents and Russia’s involvement in the Syria conflict show that Mr. Putin has a clear attachment to chemical warfare.

In 2002, Russian security agents pumped a noxious gas into a Moscow theater to end a hostage crisis, killing more than 100 people. Officials defended the action and said it represented no violation of the chemical treaty — a claim that American experts came to dispute. Mr. Putin was Russia’s president at the time.

Experts say the Kremlin’s darkest hour with chemical arms came in Syria, where it shielded the regime of President Bashar al-Assad from civil unrest and became complicit in years of toxic strikes against rebels and civilian populations.

In August 2013, Mr. al-Assad’s forces shocked the world by firing toxic chemicals on rebel-held towns near the capital, Damascus, killing more than 1,400 people, U.S. officials said.

The Obama administration identified the main poison as sarin, a liquid nerve agent that vaporizes into a deadly mist that human skin can quickly absorb. Reported symptoms included unconsciousness, foaming from the nose and mouth, rapid heartbeat and difficulty breathing. Nerve agents throw the body’s nerves and muscles into overdrive, producing spasms, paralysis and, if sufficiently concentrated, death. The iris, a muscle, contracts so much that the pupils of victims often constrict into tiny dots.

Many experts assumed that such a clear violation of international law would prompt Western military intervention, especially because President Barack Obama had declared the use of chemical arms a “red line.”

But Mr. Putin, in a New York Times opinion piece, urged restraint. “We must stop using the language of force and return to the path of civilized diplomatic and political settlement,” he said. The crisis ended when Moscow proposed that Syria put its chemical arsenal under international supervision and eventually destroy the lethal arms.

In September 2015, Mr. Putin sent Gen. Aleksandr V. Dvornikov and Russian forces to aid Mr. al-Assad’s struggling army. Russian jets were soon bombing Syrian cities. General Dvornikov helped pioneer a disinformation strategy that falsely blamed rebels for government attacks, including deadly chemical strikes. Damascus, it turned out, kept at least some of its toxic arsenal.

Dr. Nettekoven of the James Martin Center, an expert on the Syrian conflict, said the job of identifying the kind of poison and its perpetrator can take months, sometimes a year. “It’s very hard to hold a state responsible,” she said. The same may eventually be true, Dr. Nettekoven added, if Russia engages in chemical strikes in Ukraine.

Investigations can be daunting if wind or rain disperse the poisons. Some chemical agents are volatile and evaporate easily. Often, a difficulty is ensuring the integrity of what experts call the chain of custody — the careful tracking of how a sample moves from collection, to transport, to lab analysis as a way to deter tampering. The chaos of war can make that job especially hard.

Detecting the Kremlin's use of chemical agents, experts say, has been relatively easy off the battlefield. In March 2018, Sergei V. Skripal, a former Russian military officer who had worked for Britain's intelligence services as a double agent, was found in Salisbury, a quiet English cathedral city, slumped on a park bench, hallucinating and foaming at the mouth. Collapsed against him was his daughter.

Then, in August 2020, Alexei A. Navalny, a relentless critic of Mr. Putin and the president's main political opponent, was flying to Moscow when he became violently ill. Confused and perspiring heavily, he vomited, collapsed and lost consciousness.

Both men were found to have been poisoned by a military-grade nerve agent of the Novichok family, a potent class of chemical arms developed in Soviet times.

The poisonings spoke to what experts had long suspected — that Mr. Putin had retained at least some parts of his vast arsenal. Worse, analysts saw the Skripal incident as evidence that the Russian leader was ready to use the weapons overseas, as investigators found that two Russian agents had smeared Novichok on the handle of the front door of Mr. Skripal's house.

Although Russian authorities denied involvement in the two attacks, or the possession of chemical arms, both the Trump and Biden administrations imposed sanctions on a number of Russian spies, officials and research institutes.

Last year, Joseph Manso, the U.S. representative to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, called the Novichok poisonings "a clear violation" of the Chemical Weapons Convention and "a threat to international security."

In Ukraine, Western officials warn, Moscow is now using the disinformation playbook it honed in Syria to claim that Kyiv is preparing for chemical strikes as a pretext for its own attacks. "Radical Ukrainian groups," its representative to the treaty group said on March 10, "have prepared several potential scenarios of the use of toxic chemicals." Weeks later, the Azov Regiment in Mariupol accused Russia of the strike.

Also in April, Moscow appointed General Dvornikov, the former Syrian commander, as the top military leader for the Ukraine war.

Today the big uncertainty is how the West would respond if a major chemical attack in Ukraine was unambiguously tied to Russia. Unlike the case with nuclear arms, where atomic rivals hold out the possibility of responding in kind, the West has renounced use of the deadly poisons.

Analysts have suggested the application of more diplomatic pressure, more sanctions, and more cutoffs of Russian oil and gas imports to Europe. They've also argued that the response to chemical strikes on civilians rather than military units should be far more severe.

Dr. Notte of the James Martin Center said people feared chemical arms not only because of their horrific consequences for humans but also because of the response dilemma.

"The reason it scares people is we don't have good answers should it happen," she said. "Russia understands that we're constrained, and that raises fears."

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HEADLINE	05/05 Significance of Russia May 9 Victory Day
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/05/world/ukraine-russia-war-news#russia-victory-day

Marked by grandiose speeches, a colossal parade and a show of military might on Red Square, Russia's Victory Day on May 9, a holiday celebrating the Soviet Union's vanquishing of Nazi Germany, has taken on particular resonance this year with [Russia](#) mired in a [war in Ukraine](#).

The holiday will take place as Russian state television broadcasts bellicose messages about supposed Nazis in Ukraine, and as the Kremlin leads a stumbling, grinding offensive that has cost thousands of Russians and Ukrainians their lives.

Because Russia's invasion has failed to produce much in the way of victories, some analysts fear that [President Vladimir V. Putin](#) will use the occasion to turn what he has called a "special military operation" into an all-out war, and to mobilize Russians for a more broad-ranging conflict. The Kremlin, for its part, denied on Wednesday that it would declare war.

Here's a look at the significance the holiday has taken during Mr. Putin's two decades in power.

Why does Victory Day matter so much this year?

In years past, Mr. Putin has used May 9 — a near-sacred holiday for Russians to remember the 27 million Soviets who died in World War II — to mobilize the nation for the possibility of a new battle ahead. When he addressed the nation from his rostrum at Red Square on May 9 last year, he warned that Russia's enemies were deploying once again "much of the ideology of the Nazis."

Now, Russian state media is referring to Ukrainians who have resisted the Russian invasion as "Nazis," and portraying the fight as the unfinished business of World War II. It seems almost certain that Mr. Putin will use his May 9 speech next week to invoke the heroism of Soviet soldiers in World War II to try to inspire Russians to make new sacrifices. The narratives Mr. Putin has been spinning to justify his war in Ukraine are very much in line with the grand, nostalgic narratives of Victory Day.

Analysts who follow Russia closely, however, say it is far from certain that Mr. Putin will declare an official state of war and announce mass mobilization, which could entail a military draft and a prohibition on Russian men of military age being allowed to leave the country.

Although a shared respect for the sacrifices of World War II remains a unifying force in Russia, a new draft or travel restrictions could provoke a blowback. Russian forces have suffered heavy losses in Ukraine — Western officials estimate that more than 7,000 Russian soldiers have been killed — and some families of service members have [questioned the official silence](#) about the scope of casualties.

What happens on Victory Day?

Victory Day military parades in major Russian cities are followed by marches of ordinary citizens carrying pictures of relatives who fought in the war. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, take part in ["Immortal Regiment" marches honoring the soldiers and civilians who fought and died in the war](#). On Red Square, the event also features a display of historical military weapons, modern tanks and missile systems and other expressions of Russian military grandeur.

Over more than two decades, Mr. Putin has helped transform Victory Day into the most important holidays of the year, a joyous, nostalgic ritual that buttresses national pride and unifies a sometimes divided society.

Two years ago, the event was overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic. A grand party scheduled in Moscow was canceled. Billboards promoted patriotic concerts, plays and songfests that were ultimately called off. [A flyby over the city by warplanes](#) and military helicopters took place, but Moscow's mayor told residents not to go out to watch it.

Still, state television scrolled the names of the Russian dead while orange trucks sent to spray the streets with disinfectant and water were emblazoned with stickers declaring "Victory." Copies of the red banner that was raised above the Reichstag in Berlin in 1945 also flew on Moscow's streets.

In recent years, the parade on Victory Day — once attended by dignitaries from China, Germany and the United States, among others — has also reflected Russia’s growing isolation, with many foreign leaders staying away. Mr. Putin’s spokesman [said](#) last week that no foreign leaders had been invited to this year’s event, the 77th anniversary of the victory.

And the event itself became a point of tension between Ukraine and Russia in 2015, when Ukraine’s president designated May 8 the national holiday, in line with much of Europe.

How and why has Mr. Putin tied Russia’s victory over the Nazis to his Ukraine offensive?

Mr. Putin has variously called Ukraine’s government “openly neo-Nazi,” “pro-Nazi” and controlled by “little Nazis.” Announcing Russia’s “special military operation” in Ukraine, he said its goals included the “demilitarization and denazification” of the country.

The language of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has been dominated by the word “Nazi” — a bizarre contention about a country whose president, Volodymyr Zelensky, is Jewish, and last fall signed a law combating antisemitism. Mr. Putin has applied the word regularly to the country’s present-day government in recent months, though he has long referred to Ukraine’s pro-Western revolution of 2014 as a fascist coup.

The “Nazi” slur’s sudden emergence shows how Mr. Putin is [trying to use stereotypes, distorted reality and his country’s lingering World War II trauma](#) to justify his invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin is casting the war as a continuation of Russia’s fight against evil in what is known in the country as the Great Patriotic War. He appears to be counting on lingering Russian pride in the victory over Nazi Germany to carry over into support for the war in Ukraine.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Fed raises rate, largest since 2000
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/business/economy/fed-rate-decision-inflation.html
GIST	<p>The Federal Reserve raised interest rates by a half percentage point and announced a plan to shrink its massive bond holdings, decisive measures aimed at tamping down the fastest inflation in four decades.</p> <p>Wednesday’s move marked the Fed’s largest interest rate increase since 2000, and Chair Jerome H. Powell signaled at a news conference following the meeting additional half percentage point increases will be “on the table” at the Fed’s upcoming meetings.</p> <p>By shrinking its nearly \$9 trillion balance sheet at the same time as it is substantially raising rates, the Fed has charted a course for rapidly withdrawing support from the economy. The twin policies are likely to ricochet through markets and the economy as money becomes more expensive to borrow.</p> <p>The quick pullback is a sign that the central bank is getting serious about cooling down the economy and job market as rapid inflation persists and as officials grow nervous that it could become more permanent. Prices have been climbing at the fastest pace in 40 years for months now.</p> <p>“Inflation is much too high, and we understand the hardship it is causing, and we’re moving expeditiously to bring it back down,” Mr. Powell said at his news conference on Wednesday.</p> <p>“There is a broad sense on the committee that additional 50 basis point increases should be on the table at the next couple of meetings,” he later added.</p> <p>Policymakers spent much of 2021 hoping that inflation would ease on its own as supply shortages moderated and as the economy evened out following early-pandemic disruptions. But normalcy has yet to return, and inflation has only accelerated. Now, fresh pandemic-related lockdowns in China and the war in Ukraine are further elevating prices for goods, food and fuel. At the same time, workers are in short supply and wages are rising rapidly in the United States, feeding into higher prices for services as consumer demand remains strong.</p>

The “lockdowns in China are likely to exacerbate supply chain disruptions,” and the invasion of Ukraine “and related events are creating additional upward pressure on inflation and are likely to weigh on economic activity,” the [Federal Open Market Committee statement](#) for May said.

As shocks continue to roil global supply, Fed officials have decided that they no longer have the luxury of waiting for inflation to moderate on its own. Still, Mr. Powell shot down the idea of more aggressive rate increases. While some officials had signaled that a 0.75 percentage point move could be possible, Mr. Powell said Wednesday that such a big increase is “not something the committee is actively considering.”

Stocks on Wall Street rallied after Mr. Powell’s remarks, which calmed investors who had begun to worry that the fight against inflation might push the economy into a recession. The S&P 500 jumped more than 2.3 percent in afternoon trading.

“Market observers over the last week were starting to think that a 75 basis point increase was a possibility, even though it was a remote,” said Emily Bowersock Hill, the chief executive of Bowersock Capital Partners, a financial management firm. The “euphoria” in the stock market on Wednesday, Ms. Bowersock Hill said, also reflected the fact that the Fed didn’t say anything that investors weren’t already expecting.

Deciding how quickly to remove policy support is a fraught exercise. Central bankers are hoping to move decisively enough to arrest the pop in prices, without curbing growth so aggressively that they tip the economy into a painful recession. Yet [engineering a so-called soft landing is likely to be a challenge](#).

Mr. Powell nodded to that balancing act, saying “I do expect that this will be very challenging, it’s not going to be easy.” But he said “I think we have a good chance to have a soft or soft-ish” landing.

He noted later in the news conference that he believes the Fed has “a good chance to restore price stability without a recession.”

The Fed plans to [shrink its balance sheet](#) starting in June by allowing securities to mature without reinvestment. It said on Wednesday that it will ultimately let up to \$60 billion in Treasury debt expire each month, along with \$35 billion in mortgage-backed debt. That plan will have phased in fully as of September.

The Fed’s plan to reduce its holdings is likely to take steam out of financial markets and could help to cool the housing market as it lifts longer-term borrowing costs, reinforcing the effect of the central bank’s interest rate increases. The Fed’s anticipated moves have already begun to push mortgage rates higher.

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HEADLINE	05/04 New subvariant spreading rapidly in US
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/04/world/covid-19-mandates-vaccine-cases#a-new-subvariant-is-spreading-rapidly-in-the-united-states
GIST	<p>First came Omicron, then came its highly contagious subvariant, BA.2. That subvariant gave rise to its own subvariants, whose share of new coronavirus cases in the United States is growing.</p> <p>The coronavirus is constantly mutating. While some variants seem to vanish, causing little ripples of surges in their wake, others have kept driving large outbreaks. Experts say a new form, BA.2.12.1, is spreading rapidly and will likely in the next weeks become the dominant form of the virus in the United States. There’s no indication yet that causes more severe disease.</p> <p>In the week ending Saturday, BA.2.12.1 made up about 36 percent of all new cases in the United States, according to estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That’s up from 26 percent of cases the week prior, and 16 percent of infections during the second week in April.</p>

(The latest figures are rough estimates, subject to revision as more data come in. Genetic sequencing of the virus is performed on just a portion of samples across the country.)

First [detected in the United States by New York State health officials in April](#), BA.2.12.1 is spreading more rapidly than the first versions of the Omicron variant, which caused a huge surge in cases over the winter. This version descends from BA.2 and appears to have spread even more quickly, although the reasons are still under investigation.

Indeed, the virus seems to keep finding ways to spread more easily. “Omicron was more transmissible than Delta, which was more transmissible than Alpha,” Krista Queen, director of viral genomics and surveillance at Louisiana State University, said in an interview on Wednesday. BA.2.12.1 is building on that trend, she added, “and that’s why it’s taking over now, especially in the Northeast.”

New cases in New York have increased, though they remain far below the horrific numbers seen earlier in the pandemic. Yet [a number of counties have become hot spots](#), reminding state health officials that the coronavirus will not surrender regardless of general pandemic fatigue.

Dr. Queen expects rising infections to spread from the Northeast to the South then the West, driving more outbreaks. “We’re already seeing it here in Louisiana,” said Dr. Queen, who oversees genetic analysis for the virus at the university. “Our most recent sequencing runs of community samples have all been BA.2.12.1, and those samples are from mid-April.”

Reports of new cases nationally have doubled in the past month as Omicron subvariants have spread, [according to a New York Times database](#). In the last two weeks, cases overall have increased by 50 percent.

But reported cases [are likely an undercount of the virus’s true spread](#), since access to at-home tests has increased and the results are often not officially reported.

Still, virtually every reported infection across the nation is from an Omicron subvariant, and although BA.2 is still the dominant form, BA.2.12.1 is quickly gaining ground.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [said last week](#) that the agency was beginning to focus on BA.2.12.1 in addition to BA.2.

“Epidemiologically, it doesn’t appear as if we’re seeing more severe disease in places that are having more cases,” she said. “So we are not anticipating more severe disease from some of these subvariants, but we are actively studying it.”

Hospitalizations have risen more slowly than new cases — up 18 percent in two weeks — but those rates tend to trail increases in cases. Deaths have decreased 17 percent in the last two weeks.

Still, early research suggests that BA.2.12.1 evades the body’s immune defenses more adroitly than previous versions of the coronavirus, and that seems to account in some measure for its rapid spread. “In two weeks, it will probably be everywhere,” said Massimo Caputi, a professor of biomedical science at Florida Atlantic University.

But the subvariant is finding more opportunities as well. Taj Azarian, a genomic epidemiologist at the University of Central Florida, said he believes the recent surge is mostly due to “the great unmasking.”

“We’re in this phase of pandemic fatigue and complacency,” he said. “And while we need to balance the weight of mental health with the risk of contraction, as a result we’ve seen an uptick not only in the Omicron variant but other respiratory illness.”

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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/world/middleeast/turkey-syria-million-homes.html
GIST	<p>BEIRUT, Lebanon — President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey this week announced a dramatic expansion of his country’s plan to entice refugees from Syria’s civil war to return to their home country by building homes for them in Syria near the Turkish border.</p> <p>Speaking by video link at the inauguration of new cinder block homes in northern Syria intended for returning refugees who had been living in Turkey, Mr. Erdogan said that in addition to the tens of thousands already built, Turkey would construct enough new buildings to house 1 million more refugees. But it is not clear that many Syrians will take him up on the offer.</p> <p>The program, he said, was an extension of Turkey’s initial welcome of millions of Syrians fleeing the war. Turkey is the host of more Syrian refugees, by far, than any other country.</p> <p>“We didn’t just open our doors to save the lives and the honor of the oppressed,” Mr. Erdogan said. “But we made, and are making, every effort for them to return to their homes.”</p> <p>Mr. Erdogan’s announcement on Tuesday came amid a grave economic crisis that has hit the wallets of many Turks and fueled widespread anger toward the large number of people displaced from Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere who now live in Turkey.</p> <p>As the anger has grown, Turkish social media has lit up with furious posts about foreigners flying their flags in Turkish cities, enjoying themselves while Turks struggle to make ends meet and changing the cultural fabric of Turkish communities.</p> <p>“In the beginning, refugees from Syria were considered to be temporary, as guests, and Turkish citizens were in solidarity,” said Murat Erdogan, no relation to the president, a fellow of the Center for Applied Turkey Studies at the German Institute for International and Security Studies, and the director of a migration research center at Ankara University. “But I can say Turkish citizens don’t want to share their future with Syrians. They are very clearly bothered and really want them to go back.”</p> <p>In recent years, calls to send Syrian refugees home have grown and been picked up by leaders across a growing swath of the political spectrum.</p> <p>Since the civil war in Syria began in 2011, more than 5.7 million Syrians have sought refuge abroad, according to the United Nations, and about 3.7 million ended up in Turkey, whose long border with Syria for many years was easy to cross.</p> <p>Turkey’s economy was strong when the fighting was at its worst, the government in Ankara was sympathetic to the refugees’ plight, and the European Union paid billions of dollars to Turkey to help shelter migrants, in return for President Erdogan stemming the flow of them into the bloc.</p> <p>But as the war settled into a stalemate and Turkey’s economy flagged, the government firmed up its southern border and launched a policy aimed at encouraging Syrians to go home.</p> <p>Turkey’s own interventions in the war have made it the de facto overseer of a long strip of territory inside Syria and along the Turkish border, and in recent years, Mr. Erdogan’s government has fostered construction projects there aimed at providing homes for Syrian refugees in their own country.</p> <p>Mr. Erdogan’s announcement on Tuesday provided an update on those efforts and expanded their scope. So far, more than 57,000 out of 77,000 planned homes in Idlib Province in Syria’s northwest have been completed and now house 50,000 families, he said.</p> <p>In the future, that number will grow to 100,000 homes, and a new project will be started, he said, to build enough homes for an additional 1 million Syrian refugees to move to other parts of northern Syria where Turkey holds sway.</p>

In addition to homes, the project will provide schools, hospitals and “all the needs of daily life and self-sufficient economic infrastructure, from agriculture to industry,” Mr. Erdogan said.

It is unclear how many refugees have returned to Syria so far. Turkey says 500,000 have gone back since 2016. A spokesman for the United Nations refugee agency said it had recorded about 130,000 voluntary returns in the same period, but that not all returns had been recorded.

Fighting in Syria has died down since 2019, but the total number of Syrian refugees abroad has not changed significantly, the U.N. figures show.

While large parts of Syria remain outside of President Bashar al-Assad’s control, he has effectively quashed all threats to his rule and has begun [restoring diplomatic ties with some of his Arab neighbors](#).

But years of violence and extensive sanctions on Mr. al-Assad’s government have [destroyed the economy](#), leaving refugees little to go home to. Many of them fear arrest by Mr. al-Assad’s security service or simply lack the money to rebuild their lives inside the country, refugee experts say.

“Finding 1 million Syrians to voluntarily return doesn’t seem very realistic at all,” said Mr. Erdogan, the refugee expert. “They don’t see a future in Syria, the war there has become chronic, they don’t trust al-Assad, Turkey is a better place, they set up a life here.”

Political opponents of Mr. Erdogan blasted his new plan as not strong enough.

“Erdogan, let go of these stories. Fugitives are still flooding in from the border,” Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the head of the Republican People’s Party, or C.H.P., wrote on Twitter. “We have had enough of your lies.”

Over time, rising Turkish anger at the refugees could increase the pressure on them to leave.

On Tuesday, a [nine-minute video](#) was posted on YouTube called “The Silent Occupation” that depicted a dystopian future where Istanbul is dilapidated and crime-ridden, Turks are being pushed out of their neighborhoods by Arab real estate agents and a Turkish surgeon works as a janitor in a hospital where the Turkish language is banned.

An actor playing a news anchor explains that the changes started with the Syrian war and uncontrolled immigration.

The video was commissioned by Umit Ozdag, a far-right member of Parliament known for his strident anti-refugee rhetoric.

By Wednesday night, the video had been viewed more than 2.6 million times.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Seattle empty homeless shelter will open
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/after-an-apology-and-a-surprise-gift-seattles-empty-homeless-shelter-will-open-after-all-danny-westneat/
GIST	<p>Breaking news: Something worked.</p> <p>After weeks of squabbling and lobbing insults, various leaders on homelessness have come together — or, more accurately, been pushed — to open that brand-new, but unused, tiny home village in Rainier Beach that had become a symbol of bureaucratic dysfunction.</p> <p>“I’m hoping this whole episode can be a teachable moment,” suggested Seattle City Councilmember Andrew Lewis, “for how in the future we can shelter the homeless without all the drama.”</p>

Now hold on — no drama may be too big of an ask. So let's just stick to the immediate win, which is that 40 units of desperately needed shelter now are coming online after all.

Officials said they've come up with \$750,000 to operate the shuttered tiny home village, which the Low Income Housing Institute, or LIHI, completed in March. It has stood there vacant since it was rejected for operating funding by the new King County Regional Homelessness Authority, or RHA.

I won't revisit the multiple rounds of finger-pointing that ensued — other than that it culminated in the spokesperson for the authority calling the network of tiny home villages, which were painstakingly built by volunteers, "[shantytowns](#)."

Well, *that* broke the dam.

Two things then happened.

One: The CEO of the authority, Marc Dones, apologized.

"Good morning all," Dones wrote to Seattle officials. "I'm writing to apologize for an inappropriate and unauthorized comment made by a staff member in the media concerning Tiny House Villages, which — to be clear — does not represent the position of the RHA as an agency."

Dones said there are 13 such villages with more than 500 beds, and they "serve an important role in the shelter system." The agency doesn't want a "significant scaling up" of more villages, but, the letter conceded, it does want to "bring more shelter online as quickly as possible."

In other words: We're reversing course and now willing to back the dang thing.

The other prod came from something called the "Lucky Seven Foundation."

This is a little-known Seattle group that gives out hundreds of grants a year, usually in the \$1,000 to \$5,000 range, to arts and social service groups around Puget Sound. It's named after the seven members of the Frances and Manson Backus family (two parents plus five kids). They're old-school Seattle back to the 1800s.

"That article about an empty shelter going unused, it just put me over the top," says John Backus, the youngest of the seven.

"It's absurd for Seattle, with all our problems. We've got a new homeless shelter sitting there ready to go and we're not going to use it? So I just thought, 'We've got to get that open.' "

Lucky Seven is pledging \$250,000 to the cause — "a pretty big deal for us," Backus said.

Dones wrote to LIHI on Tuesday that with the private donation, the RHA could tap \$500,000 in COVID relief funds to make up the rest.

Dones is due to discuss this in front of the city's homelessness committee at 2 p.m. Wednesday. LIHI's director, Sharon Lee, said she's holding an opening ceremony at the village across from the Rainier Beach light rail station on Thursday, and then hopes to start sheltering people there soon after.

Lee said she's pleased with the outcome. But she remained frustrated, especially about an RHA claim that the agency wasn't told the shelter was finished. Lee says LIHI talked about that in an interview as part of the bid process.

Last week, she wrote to the city, asking them to take the dramatic act of pulling LIHI's contracts back from the new regional agency.

	<p>“This is not inspiring confidence in RHA — this is a real threat to programs that benefit vulnerable homeless people,” Lee wrote about the feud.</p> <p>“I feel there is still a rift over these villages,” Lee told me Tuesday. “It needs to be resolved.”</p> <p>Councilmember Lewis, who chairs the homelessness committee, took a more optimistic view.</p> <p>“I think what we have just proven, in admittedly a roundabout way, is that there is tremendous energy in this city to move forward on homelessness,” Lewis said. “The takeaway here is that people aren’t going to tolerate inaction. So I think you’re going to see a shift, toward more cooperation, more action.”</p> <p>He concluded: “We did get there eventually. After trying everything else.”</p> <p>New city motto? Just kidding. Good news doesn’t come often or easy in the fraught world of homelessness aid. So best to receive it, Seattle, no matter what strange route it took to get here.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Snohomish Co. under mountain of garbage
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/everett/snohomish-county-temporarily-close-transfer-stations/281-f47a26d0-fc7c-4671-ae7-d1a92967a928
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. — Steaming, rotting mounds of garbage, one of them at least 45-feet high, fill the Everett transfer station.</p> <p>The situation is so bad even 30-year solid waste veteran Dave Schonhard said he's never seen anything like it.</p> <p>"I want it gone," he said.</p> <p>But the garbage keeps coming.</p> <p>The facility near Paine Field processes half of the garbage in Snohomish County. One massive pile has been building since the first of the year. It currently contains nearly 7.4 million pounds of trash.</p> <p>The much smaller transfer station in Mountlake Terrace is bursting with another 3.5-million pounds. Snohomish County officials blame supply chain issues.</p> <p>Continued backups at ports across the West Coast are causing a shortage of shipping containers to haul garbage from transfer stations.</p> <p>On top of that, there is a worker shortage at Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad -- slowing down the transport of those containers to landfills.</p> <p>A total of nearly 11 million extra pounds of trash is piling up in the county.</p> <p>Snohomish County Public Works Director Kelly Snyder said temperatures deep inside the piles are hitting 130 degrees, posing a serious safety threat.</p> <p>"It's getting compacted. It's getting heated up. That will lead us to have some fire issues," she said. "We have to make sure we get this trash out and to the landfill as quickly as we can."</p> <p>Snyder added the Everett facility is on a 24-hour fire watch, as steam can be seen wafting from the top of the pile.</p>

The situation is also taking a toll on customers. What used to be a 10-minute wait to dump your junk can now take an hour. It's forcing the county to completely close all three of its transfer stations for two full weekends beginning May 7 so workers can try to catch up.

Regular hours will continue on weekdays.

Three dropbox facilities in Snohomish, Granite Falls, and Sultan will be closed for the next two weekends as well.

The plan is to move workers from the Arlington station to Everett and Mountlake Terrace to work on the backlogs.

Snohomish County recently authorized \$2 million in emergency funds for extra help moving the trash.

"We really do have a fairly good rate structure, right now," said Solid Waste Director Dave Schonhard. "We hope that we can weather this crisis without having to ask for additional funds from the county council."

Snohomish County officials hope the emergency move will get them back to baseline in two weeks but they say problems persist in the supply chain and they can't rule out another shutdown.

And as the weather warms, officials worry that time is running out for them to dig themselves out of this mess.

"It's busy for us now but summertime is an incredibly busy time so we want to have some more permanent solutions in place as quickly as possible," Snyder said.

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HEADLINE	05/04 First responders gigantic map exercise
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/disaster/fema-map-earthquake-exercise-washington-first-responders/281-32298c4d-4d99-45bc-84d1-be20dece4c76
GIST	<p>CAMP MURRAY, Wash. — First responders preparing for a massive earthquake planned on repeating the 2016 Cascadia Rising exercise, complete with troop and machinery movements.</p> <p>However, COVID-19 outbreaks in the fall caused the Federal Emergency Management Agency to downscale those plans for 2022.</p> <p>So instead of helicopters and dispatchers, a group of 200 emergency officials, with another 500 online, participated in an exercise at Camp Murray with an oversized map of the Pacific Northwest.</p> <p>Think of it as a big board game. The goal: try and get resources to western Washington following a 9.0 earthquake and tsunami.</p> <p>"Those blue lines are our roads that we think will survive based on science, based on criteria," said FEMA Region 10 Administrator Willie Nunn. "The orange lines may or may not be passable."</p> <p>He said the map exercise still enables first responders to interact and learn what to expect in a natural disaster.</p> <p>"This allows us to look at what's real, what we can do, what more resources we're going to need, and how do we come together as a team," said Nunn.</p> <p>The 2016 exercise, a week-long event involving thousands across the state, found more preparation was needed and communication lines needed to be improved between agencies, based on an analysis of the event.</p>

	<p>”We just saw how fragile our infrastructure systems were. And it really became crystal clear that much of the Cascadia response is going to be a huge logistics challenge,” said Washington’s Emergency Management Director Robert Ezelle.</p> <p>Ezelle said working out some of those logistics can be done with the map exercise, a three-day event.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Seattle crew clears Ballard encampment
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/project-seattle/ballard-camp-cleared-as-regional-homeless-agency-unveil-5-year-plan-for-unsheltered
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle city crews on Wednesday cleared an encampment from Ballard, prompting relief from some residents in the area even as they raised question's about the city's long-term plan to address homeless groups in their neighborhood.</p> <p>The site along 49th Street and Leary Way has generated complaints from residents for at least two years, say people who live in the area.</p> <p>Micah Trotti lives a couple of blocks away from where the camp was and said it has been the source of neighborhood crimes since 2019 that include open air drug use and mounting piles of trash and debris.</p> <p>Although the site was cleared, he said city officials need to do more to ensure that the campers don't return.</p> <p>Officials from the King County Regional Homelessness Authority provided an update to the city's Public Assets and Homelessness Committee about its five-year plan to get the unsheltered off city streets.</p> <p>Part of their plan calls for awarding funds to organizations that work with the homeless, including Chief Seattle Club, which was allocated \$1.9 million; PDA, awarded \$1.5 million; and Catholic Community Services, which was given \$471,550.</p> <p>“This will open 50 new tiny homes between Seattle and Catholic Community Services,” said Marc Dones, director of the King County Regional Homelessness Authority</p> <p>Another part of the plan calls for allocating \$2.4 million to an RV Safe Lot program that will include housing search services for those who need them.</p> <p>“This has historically been an area of significant underspend and the need is quite high," Dones said. "Not just (for) Seattle metro but across the county as well.”</p> <p>In Ballard, many residents agree that part of the solution is helping people find permanent housing.</p> <p>“We also understand, you can’t just push them out without having a place for them to go,” Trotti said</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Some never sick even after Covid exposure
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/a-covid-mystery-why-do-some-people-never-get-sick-even-when-exposed
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A big mystery of the COVID-19 pandemic that researchers are baffled by is that some people are exposed to the virus but never get sick even as others are diagnosed with it multiple times, despite being vaccinated.</p> <p>Local researchers say figuring out why that happens is an important question, and they're working to find the answer.</p> <p>Lakewood Police Department Lt. Andy Gildehaus was working specialty patrol when the pandemic began.</p>

"Being in a business that's 24/7/365, you don't have that option to say, 'Well we're gonna shut it down for a while and let it pass by,'" he said.

Lakewood Police Chief Mike Zaro couldn't tell his officers to work from home.

"We still had 911 calls and had a job to do," Zaro said. "So that's been the balance that's been tricky from the beginning."

Researchers are trying to figure out why people respond differently to COVID-19.

Like other first responders, they took all possible precautions, but there was no avoiding COVID-19.

The department suffered several small outbreaks, and some people, including the police chief, got sick.

"Twice as a matter of fact. I'm a two-timer," Zaro said. "The first time was December of 2020, so before the vaccine was around, and really in the depths of the lockdown and precautions. I was taking all reasonable precautions, as much as anyone else, and there was no way of knowing where I got it."

Zaro's second illness came a year later during the Omicron wave.

But Gildehaus? "Without a doubt I've had exposure to people with COVID," he said. "I have never gotten COVID. My wife has gotten COVID. Two of my sons have gotten COVID. But I have been very fortunate and I've never gotten COVID."

Gildehaus and Zaro are both fully vaccinated. Both are healthy, and both followed guidelines.

Outcomes like theirs are at the heart of the research in Dr. Michael Gale, Junior's lab at UW Medicine. Gale is a professor of Immunology and an expert on innate immunity.

While we develop active immunity to a virus from infection or vaccination, Gale says some people haven't gotten sick thanks to innate immunity.

"Every cell in our body has the ability to mount an immune response against a virus," Gale explained. "This is at the molecular level. Not T-cells, not antibodies. It's a molecular response that's geared to fight off the virus. We collectively call this the innate immune response. The local area that sees the virus first mounts an innate immune response that presents the expression of genes, whose job it is to turn on and shut off the virus so it won't spread. This is what protects the majority of people from developing severe symptoms and only having mild disease." Or, not getting sick at all.

His team of 15 scientists is working to harness that innate immune response to develop new therapeutics.

Dr. Michael Davis is a senior scientist in the Gale lab. Davis said they're looking for the specific genes that turn on that innate immune response. "It's a lot like looking at a car engine and figuring out what makes it work. You take one piece out, does it still run. We can do the same thing with the innate immune response. Take out one gene, see if it still runs. If it doesn't, we know that's important for the whole process to work," Davis said.

They're learning more each day, but solving the mystery will take time. Gale said they have some therapeutics nearing phase one clinical trial, while others are at least five years away.

In the meantime, they point out the virus is continually evolving. They say even people who haven't gotten sick yet should get vaccinated.

"It's not a zero-risk game," Davis said.

	<p>That's something police know every day.</p> <p>While Guildehaus might have a genetic advantage over COVID, Chief Zaro's focus is on keeping his officers safe from all threats and hazards.</p> <p>"I'm no more concerned today than I was a couple years ago," Zaro said. "COVID is just on more thing that we have to be mindful of."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Seattle Sounders win CCL championship
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/sports/sounders/with-ccl-championship-in-hand-the-sounders-join-realm-of-world-soccer-elites/
GIST	<p>The Sounders came with designs on history, and their fans poured in, nearly 70,000 strong, to will them to it.</p> <p>In the feverish buildup to Wednesday night's showdown at Lumen Field, no one even tried to downplay the importance of this CONCACAF Champions League final. The Sounders had won two MLS Cups, four US Open Cups and a Supporters' Shield since 2009, but they viewed this showdown against Pumas UNAM, Seattle's sixth final under coach Brian Schmetzer, as the ultimate test. And the one with the most profound and far-reaching potential payoff — "immortality," in the words of general manager Garth Lagerwey, and a "massive (expletive) deal for the club" in the quaint assessment of Schmetzer.</p> <p>And then the Sounders went out and grabbed it, defeating Pumas, 3-0, in a rough-and-tumble match to culminate what has to viewed as the greatest achievement in club and certainly MLS history. In the process, they left no doubt that the CONCACAF balance of power, weighted decisively in favor of Mexican teams for decades, had undergone a sea change.</p> <p>While the Sounders' two MLS Cups were indeed epic in unique ways, this title, by an aggregate score of 5-2 in the two legs, transcends the limits of mere league glory. In becoming the first MLS side ever to win the CCL title, breaking the string of Liga MX teams winning every year since 2008 — and also a string of four finals losses by the MLS — they struck a massive blow for MLS prestige on the international stage. And they separated themselves from their MLS brethren with a win that suddenly thrusts the Sounders into the realm of the world elites.</p> <p>That might sound like hyperbole — and certainly the Sounders delivered on the "hype" part with promo videos leading up to the match by two of Seattle's sports icons, Marshawn Lynch and Ken Griffey Jr. — but consider the spoils of this victory. The Sounders now get an automatic entry into the FIFA Club World Cup, which brings together the continental champions of federations from around the world — Asia, Africa, South America, Oceania and Europe in addition CONCACAF, which stands for the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football.</p> <p>In other words, Seattle will be among the best and brightest in the world of soccer. As an example, Europe will be represented by either Liverpool or Real Madrid, soccer royalty no matter who advances. For the Sounders to get to dip into that pool is a huge step for MLS to gain the sort of worldwide respect it has been striving for from the outset.</p> <p>For the Sounders, meanwhile, it stamps them as a destination team in the MLS, which should pay off down the road in player recruitment, as well as gives them a trophy that had eluded them in six previous forays into this tournament. And now they can measure themselves against the upper echelon the sport has to offer when the Club World Cup is contested, presumably early in 2023.</p> <p>But that is something for the future. In the moment, as the crowd of 68,741 — largest ever for a CONCACAF Champions League match at any stage — tried their best to replicate a Beast-Quake roar, it was a time to celebrate.</p>

“The connection to fans and players is the spirit of this club,” Schmetzer said when the on-field party was finally done.

After knotting 2-2 with Pumas in Mexico City in the first stage of the final, the Sounders dominated the second stage of the match despite losing two key players, Nouhou and Joao Paulo, to injury in the first 25 minutes. Raul Ruidiaz got the scoring going in the 45th minute with a goal that had the press box shaking from the resulting din, then added another goal in the 80th minute on the back end of as beautiful a display of precision (and unselfish) passing as you’ll ever see, first from Jordan Morris and then Nico Lodeiro. And Lodeiro closed out the scoring in the 88th minute, ripping off his jersey to unofficially commence the giddy celebration portion of the night.

But not before Schmetzer, in a classy gesture that won’t go unappreciated by team members, took out Ruidiaz, Lodeiro and Morris three minutes into stoppage time to allow them their deserved ovation. He also inserted team elders Will Bruin and Fredy Montero to allow them a taste of this historic match from inside the pitch.

When the clock expired, the Sounders team exploded into a ballet of leaps and hugs, punctuated by a deluge of confetti, a victory celebration not seen here since the MLS Cup was secured over Toronto in 2019.

That was euphoric, but this was next level. Schmetzer demurred and deferred when asked where this victory and title ranked in the annals of great Sounders moments.

“I said in some press thing, give me six months,” he said. “I’m probably going to stick to that. Right now. I’m living in the moment. And I’m just so proud of that group of players, all of them. Because it’s not just the guys that scored the goals tonight. And it’s not just the Yeimars and Stefs (goalie Stefan Frei), those guys, but it’s all the young kids that are coming out. The academy guys, they all get a taste of what this club is all about.

“I’m just super, super proud of the way the team performed throughout this tournament. Under some adversity; it’s not an easy tournament to win. A lot of people were asking me about the subtle pressure about coming here to perform in front of a large crowd. I think they passed that test. They passed it with flying colors.”

Addressing the crowd after the game, Schmetzer told them their role in energizing the team was “freaking awesome.” In talking to the media later, he changed the adjectives to “spectacular” and “awesome.”

“You guys heard it when the teams walked out tonight. You felt the energy in the building. The players felt it.”

By the time the final seconds ticked off, the energy had grown exponentially. And for good reason. Because this win was a massive expletive deal for the Sounders, for Seattle, and for North American soccer.

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HEADLINE	05/04 US intel aids Ukraine killing Russia generals
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/us/politics/russia-generals-killed-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The United States has provided intelligence that has helped Ukrainians target and kill many of the Russian generals who have died in action in the Russia-Ukraine war, according to senior U.S. officials.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials said they have killed approximately 12 generals on the front lines, a number that has astonished military analysts.</p>

The targeting help is part of a classified effort by the Biden administration to provide real-time battlefield intelligence to Ukraine. That intelligence also includes anticipated Russian troop movements gleaned from recent U.S. assessments of Moscow's secret battle plan for the fighting in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, the officials said. Officials declined to specify how many generals had been killed as a result of U.S. assistance.

The United States has focused on providing the location and other details about the Russian military's mobile headquarters, which relocate frequently. Ukrainian officials have combined that geographic information with their own intelligence — including intercepted communications that alert the Ukrainian military to the presence of senior Russian officers — to conduct artillery strikes and other attacks that have killed Russian officers.

The intelligence sharing is part of a stepped-up flow in U.S. assistance that includes heavier weapons and tens of billions of dollars in aid, demonstrating how quickly the early U.S. restraints on support for Ukraine have shifted as the war enters a new stage that could play out over months.

U.S. intelligence support to the Ukrainians has had a decisive effect on the battlefield, confirming targets identified by the Ukrainian military and pointing it to new targets. The flow of actionable intelligence on the movement of Russian troops that America has given Ukraine has few precedents.

Since failing to advance on Kyiv, the capital, in the early part of the war, Russia has tried to regroup, with a more concentrated push in eastern Ukraine that so far has moved slowly and unevenly.

Officials interviewed for this article spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss details of the classified intelligence being shared with Ukraine.

The administration has sought to keep much of the battlefield intelligence secret, out of fear it will be seen as an escalation and provoke President Vladimir Putin of Russia into a wider war. U.S. officials would not describe how they have acquired information on Russian troop headquarters, for fear of endangering their methods of collection. But throughout the war, the U.S. intelligence agencies have used a variety of sources, including classified and commercial satellites, to trace Russian troop movements.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin went so far as to say last month that “we want to see Russia weakened to the degree it cannot do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine.”

Asked about the intelligence being provided to the Ukrainians, John Kirby, the Pentagon spokesperson, said that “we will not speak to the details of that information.” But he acknowledged that the U.S. provides “Ukraine with information and intelligence that they can use to defend themselves.”

Not all the strikes have been carried out with U.S. intelligence. A strike over the weekend at a location in eastern Ukraine where Gen. Valery Gerasimov, Russia's highest-ranking uniformed officer, had visited was not aided by U.S. intelligence, according to multiple U.S. officials. The United States prohibits itself from providing intelligence about the most senior Russian leaders, officials said.

But U.S. intelligence was critical in the deaths of other generals, officials acknowledged.

The United States routinely provides information about the movement of Russian troops and equipment, and helps Ukraine confirm the location of critical targets. Other NATO allies also give real-time intelligence to the Ukrainian military.

The Biden administration is also supplying new weaponry that should improve Ukraine's ability to target senior Russian officers. The smaller version of the Switchblade drone, which is now arriving on the battlefield, can be used to identify and kill individual soldiers, and could take out a general sitting in a vehicle or giving orders on a front line.

U.S. officials have acknowledged publicly that the United States began giving Ukraine actionable intelligence in the run-up to Russia's invasion on Feb. 24. Before the invasion, for example, U.S. intelligence agencies warned of an impending attack on the Hostomel airport north of Kyiv. That allowed Ukraine to strengthen its defenses. Russian airborne forces were ultimately unable to hold the airfield.

While the information the United States has provided Ukraine has proved valuable, Russian generals have often left themselves exposed to electronic eavesdropping by speaking over unsecure phones and radios, current and former U.S. military officials said.

"It shows poor discipline, lack of experience, arrogance and failure to appreciate Ukrainian capabilities," said Frederick B. Hodges, the former top U.S. Army commander in Europe who is now with the Center for European Policy Analysis. "It is not hard to geo-locate someone on a phone talking in the clear."

Russian military tactics have also left senior generals vulnerable. A centralized, top-down command hierarchy gives decision-making authority only to the highest levels — compared to the more decentralized American structure that pushes many battlefield decisions to senior enlisted personnel and junior officers — forcing Russian generals to make risky trips to the front lines to resolve logistical and operational issues.

"When there are problems, the general officers have to go sort it out," Hodges said.

Although the administration remains wary of inflaming Putin to the point that he further escalates his attacks — President Joe Biden has said he will not send U.S. troops to Ukraine or establish a "no-fly zone" there — current and former officials said the White House finds some value in warning Russia that Ukraine has the weight of the United States and NATO behind it.

Some European officials believe, despite Putin's rhetoric that Russia is battling NATO and the West, he has so far been deterred from starting a wider war. U.S. officials are less certain, and have been debating for weeks why Putin has not done more to escalate the conflict.

Officials said Moscow has its own calculations to weigh, including whether it can handle a bigger war, particularly one that would allow NATO to invoke its mutual defense charter or enter the war more directly.

"Clearly, we want the Russians to know on some level that we are helping the Ukrainians to this extent, and we will continue to do so," said Evelyn Farkas, the former top Defense Department official for Russia and Ukraine in the Obama administration. "We will give them everything they need to win, and we're not afraid of Vladimir Putin's reaction to that. We won't be self-deterred."

But intelligence sharing is considered a safe form of help because it is invisible, or, at least, deniable.

U.S. intelligence has given secret information to Ukraine in a wide range of areas, from Russian troop movements to targeting data, officials said.

Last month, the United States increased the flow of intelligence to Ukraine about Russian forces in the Donbas and Crimea, as Kyiv's military forces prepared to defend against a renewed offensive by Moscow in eastern Ukraine, U.S. officials said.

"There's a significant amount of intelligence flowing to Ukraine from the United States," Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a Senate panel on Tuesday. "We have opened up the pipes."

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HEADLINE	05/04 Outbreak mars cruise industry comeback
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/seattle-cruise-industry-marks-comeback-from-covid-with-covid-outbreak-on-cruise-ship/

Just days into what was supposed to be the Seattle cruise industry's comeback from COVID-19, a cruise ship steamed into Elliott Bay carrying dozens of passengers with the illness.

Tuesday's arrival of the stricken Carnival Spirit was an inauspicious inaugural for an industry that pumped nearly \$1 billion into the state economy before COVID and whose return is seen as key to the revival of downtown Seattle.

Carnival Cruise Line declined to say how many of Spirit's approximately 3,000 passengers tested positive for the coronavirus.

A Carnival spokesperson said in an email Wednesday only that the vessel's crew "managed a number of COVID cases" during the journey from Miami via the Panama Canal. "There were no serious health issues, and while some guests showed minor symptoms, most were asymptomatic," spokesperson Matt Lupoli said.

But some passengers on the 16-day voyage said there were more than 100 cases aboard and that the outbreak "overwhelmed" the crew, according to media and social media accounts.

"They didn't have enough staff to handle the emergency that was happening, period," passenger Darren Siefert told KING 5. "They were overwhelmed and they didn't have a backup course in how to handle about 200 people affected with COVID. We all suffered."

On Facebook, several people who described themselves as passengers shared similar complaints about Carnival's handling of the outbreak.

Carnival officials didn't comment on passengers' reports. They said the company is providing "transportation and lodging support for guests who needed to quarantine per Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines." Those passengers are reportedly staying in Seattle-area hotels.

According to the CDC, the Carnival Spirit outbreak meets the threshold for an investigation, which means 0.3% or more of the ship's 3,054 passengers and crew tested positive for COVID. The agency considered the vessel to be "highly vaccinated," with 95% or more of travelers vaccinated against COVID-19.

Of the 92 cruise ships operating in U.S. waters, 76 have reported at least one COVID case among passengers or crew members, according to the CDC's cruises dashboard. Carnival has 22 cruises operating; all but four have positive cases.

Carnival participates in a CDC program that requires the cruise line to have an agreement with the local health agency and port authority in the cities each ship visits. Carnival has an agreement with Public Health — Seattle & King County, spokesperson Kate Cole said in an email.

As part of the agreement, the cruise line must have plans in place with a local medical provider and quarantine facilities to avoid straining local medical and isolation or quarantine facilities.

The outbreak aboard the Spirit comes a day after officials with Carnival and the Port of Seattle held a ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the opening of the cruise season after two years of reduced sailings due to COVID.

Many Seattle-area businesses that depend on tourists, especially downtown hotels and restaurants and Pike Place Market vendors, are counting on a full cruise season to make up for lost revenue.

Thanks to an abbreviated cruise season and fewer sailings in 2021, the Seattle cruise industry had roughly 227,000 passengers, or a fifth of the 2019 total, according to the Port of Seattle.

	A day after arriving in Seattle, the Spirit departed again for Tracy Arm, Alaska, and by noon Wednesday was just west of Brooks Bay, British Columbia, according to marinetraffic.com. The Spirit is scheduled to return to Seattle on May 10.
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HEADLINE	05/04 Asylum limits expanded before ending rule
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/us-quietly-expands-asylum-limits-while-preparing-to-end-them/
GIST	<p>SAN DIEGO (AP) — The Biden administration has begun expelling Cubans and Nicaraguans to Mexico under pandemic-related powers to deny migrants a chance to seek asylum, expanding use of the rule even as it publicly says it has been trying to unwind it, officials said Wednesday.</p> <p>The U.S. struck an agreement with Mexico to expel up to 100 Cubans and 20 Nicaraguans a day from three locations: San Diego; El Paso, Texas; and Rio Grande Valley, Texas, according to a U.S. official with direct knowledge of the effort.</p> <p>The expulsions began April 27 and will end May 22, the official told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the agreement has not been made public. They are carried out under Title 42 authority, which was named for a public health law and used to expel migrants on the grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19. Title 42 is due to expire May 23.</p> <p>The U.S. and Mexico agreed April 26 to very limited expulsions of Cubans and Nicaraguans, according to a high-level Mexican official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly. It was prompted by higher numbers of migrants from those two countries coming to the U.S. border.</p> <p>Another Mexican official, also not authorized to comment publicly, confirmed that up to 100 Cubans and 20 Nicaraguans were being expelled from San Diego under Title 42 under an agreement that runs through May 22.</p> <p>The U.S. Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>Until last week, Mexico only agreed to take Guatemalans, Hondurans and El Salvadorans — in addition to Mexicans — under Title 42 authority. Other nationalities are subject to Title 42 but costs, strained diplomatic ties and other considerations often make it difficult to send them back to their home countries.</p> <p>It's next to impossible for the U.S. to expel migrants to Cuba or Nicaragua due to poor relations with those governments. That has posed an acute challenge for the Biden administration as more people from those countries seek haven in the United States.</p> <p>Cubans were stopped by U.S. authorities more than 32,000 times on the Mexican border in March, double the number in February and more than five times October's count, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Nicaragua eased travel restrictions from Cuba in November, making it easier for Cubans to continue by land to the U.S. border. Most enter the U.S. in or near Yuma, Arizona, and Del Rio, Texas.</p> <p>Last month, Cuba and the United States took a tentative step toward thawing relations and resuming joint efforts to address irregular migration during the highest-level talks between the two countries in four years.</p> <p>There were no major breakthroughs, but the mere fact that the U.S. was holding substantive talks was a sign relations might be looking better under President Joe Biden after going into deep freeze under his predecessor, Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernandez de Cossio said Friday.</p> <p>"They seem committed. They ratified that they are committed to the agreements in place," Fernandez de Cossio said. "So we have no reason to mistrust what they're saying, but time will tell."</p>

Nicaraguans were stopped more than 16,000 times in March, more than double September's level. The vast majority enter in South Texas.

Lifting Title 42 has proven controversial as midterm elections near, even for Biden's Democratic Party, amid concerns that the U.S. is unprepared for an anticipated increase in migrants seeking asylum. Authorities stopped migrants more than 221,000 times in March, the highest mark in 22 years.

The White House and Homeland Security Department have publicly stood behind the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's decision to end the measure because it could no longer be justified on grounds of protecting public health.

But the practice of expelling Cubans and Nicaraguans runs counter to the administration's public statements that it was phasing out use of the pandemic powers to prepare for May 23. The Washington Post reported earlier Wednesday that U.S. and Mexico struck an agreement to do so for Cubans and Nicaraguans.

The U.S. has expelled migrants more than 1.8 million times under Title 42 authority since March 2020, effectively overriding rights to seek asylum under U.S. law and international treaty. In doing so, migrants are not subject to immigration law, which include rights to seek protection from persecution at home.

The administration said in court filings that it began processing more Central American adults under immigration laws after the CDC's announcement on April 1. But a federal judge in Louisiana ruled last week that it couldn't start unwinding Title 42 while it was still in effect.

U.S. District Judge Robert Summerhays strongly criticized the CDC's decision, suggesting he would try to keep Title 42 in effect after May 23. A hearing is scheduled May 13 for oral arguments.

Marisa Limón, senior director of advocacy and planning at the Hope Border Institute, said advocates began learning about expulsions of Cubans and Nicaraguans from El Paso on Monday and later confirmed the new practice with U.S. officials.

Limón said the administration is "trying to get every last bit out of Title 42" before it expires. She called it "sobering" but consistent with the administration's efforts to have other countries in the Western hemisphere take more responsibility for hosting people fleeing their homes.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Covid declines except in Americas, Africa
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/who-covid-continues-to-decline-except-in-americas-africa/
GIST	<p>GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization said Wednesday that the number of newly reported coronavirus cases and deaths globally continued to fall in the last week, continuing a decline that first began in March.</p> <p>In its weekly report on the pandemic, the U.N. health agency said there were about 3.8 million new infections and more than 15,000 deaths last week, a 17% and 3% drop on the week respectively. But those figures are believed to be a significant underestimate of COVID-19's true toll as increasing numbers of countries abandon widespread testing and surveillance.</p> <p>Still, the WHO noted that cases rose by about a third in Africa and 13% in the Americas. There was also a nearly 70% jump in deaths reported in India, although that was attributed to delayed reporting rather than a recent surge of disease.</p> <p>Last week, authorities in South Africa said they had noted an uptick in COVID-19 cases attributable to the BA.4 mutant of omicron, although they said it was too early to tell if that would result in a significant new wave of disease. Although the BA.4 version of COVID-19's omicron variant appears more infectious than</p>

omicron, the WHO said there was no evidence yet that it was leading to substantially higher rates of hospitalization or death.

Salim Abdool Karim, a public health expert at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, said that while only a “modest” rise in cases had been noted, South Africa was also in the middle of a holiday period and testing had dropped significantly. He said the cases were slowing and were “not following a rocket-like upward trajectory we would expect” in another spike of disease.

At a press briefing on Wednesday, WHO emergencies chief Dr. Michael Ryan said it was soon to tell if COVID-19 was entering a seasonal pattern and warned against countries dropping all of their restrictions too quickly — as many in the West have done.

“The jury is still out as to how seasonal this virus will become,” he said, explaining that it wasn’t proven yet that COVID-19 would naturally drop off in the summer and that the world could yet face more unsettling variants. “If people are crowded together in conditions where a new variant is spreading, you will see high levels of transmission,” he said.

Meanwhile in China, authorities continued to crack down on cities including Beijing, where more than 10% of the subway system was shut down in an effort to curb the virus’ spread, after authorities in the capital already closed down indoor dining, gyms and school classes.

In Shanghai, rigid and widely derided restrictions have led to shortages of food and medical aid along with a wider — though likely temporary — impact on the national economy. Desperate, outraged citizens have confronted authorities at barricades and online, screamed out of their windows and banged pots and pans in a sign of frustration and anger.

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HEADLINE	05/04 UN: record number acute food insecurity
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/un-record-number-of-people-without-enough-to-eat-in-2021/
GIST	<p>ROME (AP) — The United Nations said Wednesday that the number of people without enough to eat on a daily basis reached all-time high last year and is poised to hit “appalling” new levels as the Ukraine war affects global food production.</p> <p>Almost 193 million people in 53 countries suffered acute food insecurity in 2021 due to what the U.N. said was a “toxic triple combination” of conflict, weather extremes and the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>The U.N. said the total number of people without adequate food every day increased by 40 million last year, confirming a “worrisome trend” of annual increases over several years.</p> <p>The figures appeared in the Global Report on Food Crisis, which is produced jointly by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Food Program and the European Union.</p> <p>Countries experiencing protracted conflicts, including Afghanistan, Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen, had the most food-insecure populations, according to the report.</p> <p>The report forecasts that Somalia will face one of the world’s worst food crises in 2022 due to prolonged drought, increasing food prices and persistent violence. The various factors could lead 6 million Somalis into acute food crisis, the U.N. said.</p> <p>“Today, if more is not done to support rural communities, the scale of the devastation in terms of hunger and lost livelihoods will be appalling,” the U.N. said. “Urgent humanitarian action is needed on a massive scale to prevent that from happening.”</p>

The war in Ukraine poses further risks for Somalia and many other African countries that rely on Ukraine and Russia for wheat, fertilizer and other food supplies.

WFP's Chief Economist Arif Husain said the U.N. food agency projects that an additional 47 million people will become food insecure "in crisis or worse situation" because of the war in Ukraine as a result of higher food and fuel prices and inflation.

Even before the war, people were dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and reduced incomes, and food prices were at a 10-year high and fuel prices were at a seven-year high, he told reporters at U.N. headquarters in New York at a virtual press conference launching the report.

"This crisis is potentially more fuel on a fire which was already lit and burning up," Husain said.

The United Nations previously said the war was helping to send prices for commodities such as grains and vegetable oils to record highs, threatening millions with hunger and malnourishment.

"When we look at the consequences of what's happening as a result of the war in Ukraine, there is real cause for concern of how this will amplify the acute food needs that exist in these food crisis countries," said Rein Paulsen, director of the Food and Agriculture Organization's office of emergencies and resilience.

He told the virtual U.N. briefing that the percentage of the population analyzed in the report who are in acute food insecurity has gone up from just over 11% in 2016 to just over 22% in 2021.

At the same time, Paulsen said, funding to help them has dropped, which is a huge concern. In 2021 \$8.1 billion was available for emergency work, a 25% drop from 2017, he said.

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The report called for greater investment in agriculture and appealed for \$1.5 billion to help farmers in at-risk regions with the upcoming planting season to help stabilize and increase local food production.

WFP's Husain said his message to rich nations in the G7 and G20 is that food insecurity and hunger around the world are "exploding" and "if we don't address these issues we end up paying frankly thousand times more just a few years down the road." He said the world has seen this happen with the Syrian war and outpouring to Europe, with Afghanistan, and with Central Americans and Haitians trying to enter the U.S.

FAO's Paulsen said his message to donor nations is: "We need to put the same energy collectively that we put into addressing the COVID-19 pandemic into addressing acute hunger. ... It's about political will and focus."

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HEADLINE	05/04 King Co. library system wipes all late fees
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/books/king-county-library-system-wipes-all-late-fees-will-resume-fines-in-september/
GIST	<p>The King County Library System, which hasn't been charging late fees for books and materials since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, wiped all late fees Wednesday and announced it will start fining procrastinating patrons on Sept. 15.</p> <p>"We understand patrons may have accumulated overdue materials during the pandemic, and we don't want that to keep them from accessing everything that KCLS has to offer," the system's executive director, Lisa</p>

Rosenblum, said via a spokesperson. “We hope this initiative gives patrons the financial assistance they may need and extra time to return overdue items.”

This “Fresh Start for All,” as the system’s board of trustees termed it, will not apply to materials that are considered “lost” — that is, more than 30 days overdue. On May 4, the King County libraries will begin processing those fees again and patrons will have until Sept. 15 to return items or pay fees before the accounts are blocked from further borrowing. The library system will mail billing notices to accounts with over \$25 in fees.

Late fines account for less than 1% of the library system’s budget, but a \$208,000 grant from the King County Library System Foundation will help pay for this. A spokesperson said that based on historical data, the library system would normally expect to collect up to \$468,000 that it won’t now, with this move.

King County Library Systems’ 50 locations are almost entirely outside of Seattle, which has its own library system [that stopped charging late fees entirely a few months before the pandemic](#). The Seattle library system still suspends accounts with overdue materials and charges replacement fees for lost or damaged materials, and refers accounts with \$25 balances or more to collection agencies.

For years, the county library system has cost far more to run than it gains from things like late fees. It stays open, like Seattle’s library, with help from a county levy on assessed value of property, which pays for 97% of the budget, according to the [library system’s 2022 preliminary budget document](#). The library system raised the “lid” of the levy (how much it charges per \$1,000 of assessed value) in 2002 and 2010 to cover increased costs in maintenance, salaries and health care benefits.

The board of trustees planned to ask King County voters to raise the rate of money per \$1,000 of assessed value again in 2020, but postponed because of the pandemic. As the \$135 million budget has gotten more stretched, the library system has reduced the size of its staff — from 882 full-time staff in 2018, to 819 projected through this year, according to the budget narrative.

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HEADLINE	05/05 Russia ruble highest level since Mar 2020
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-rouble-hits-highest-level-since-march-2020-sanctions-talk-focus-2022-05-05/
GIST	<p>May 5 (Reuters) - The Russian rouble briefly reached its highest level against the U.S. dollar since March 2020 on Thursday, supported by capital controls, while stock indexes also climbed as the market watched developments around possible new sanctions against Moscow.</p> <p>The volatile currency hit a high of 65.31 per dollar in early trading on the Moscow Exchange but by 0716 GMT was at 66.60, which was 0.4% lower than its Wednesday closing level.</p> <p>The morning peak level had not been seen since the onset of COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The rouble has rallied in the past few weeks thanks to mandatory conversion of foreign currency by export-focused companies. Also, there has been weak demand for dollars and euros amid waning imports and restrictions on cross-border transactions.</p> <p>Moves in the rouble are sharper than usual as market liquidity has been thinned by central bank restrictions designed to prop up financial stability after Russia sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24.</p> <p>Against the euro, the rouble was 0.3% stronger at 70.20 , hovering at levels last seen in February 2020.</p> <p>Proposals for new sanctions against Russia, including an oil embargo, were in focus as the West sought to deepen Moscow's isolation.</p>

	<p>The rouble showed little reaction to the U.S. Federal Reserve's move to raise its benchmark overnight interest rate by half a percentage point, the biggest jump in 22 years.</p> <p>Direct impact of U.S. monetary policy on the Russian market was distorted by sanctions and restrictions on investment, said Dmitry Polevoy, head of investment at LockoInvest. But Russia would still feel the effects through global inflation and commodity prices.</p> <p>Russian stock indexes were up. The dollar-denominated RTS index (.IRTS) rose 2.6% to 1,142.7 points. The rouble-based MOEX Russian index (.IMOEX) was 1.4% higher at 2,406.5 points.</p> <p>"Thanks to an improved external backdrop, the Russian stock market can try to recover yesterday's losses if there is no news about new sanctions," Promsvyazbank analysts said, adding that the MOEX could top 2,450 during the day.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Covid transmission more likely from air
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/health/health-news/covid-virus-air-surface/2022/05/04/id/1068499/
GIST	<p>If you're still wiping down groceries, doorknobs and light switches in an attempt to thwart COVID-19, maybe you can relax a little: You're 1,000 times more likely to get COVID from the air you breathe than from surfaces you touch, a new study suggests.</p> <p>University of Michigan researchers tested air and surface samples around their campus and found odds are greater for inhaling virus particles than picking them up on your fingers.</p> <p>"In this study, we set out to better understand potential exposures to the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus — the virus which causes COVID-19 — in several college campus settings," explained study author Richard Neitzel, a professor of environmental health sciences and global public health.</p> <p>The settings included offices, classrooms, performance spaces, cafeterias, buses and a gym. However, the samples were taken during the pandemic lockdown, so these were relatively empty spaces.</p> <p>"We also used information on campus COVID-19 infections to estimate the probability of infection associated with our environmental measurements," added Neitzel.</p> <p>"The overall risk of exposure to the virus was low at all of the locations we measured," he said.</p> <p>However, "our results suggest that there was a much higher risk of infection from inhalation than from contact with surfaces like door handles, drinking fountains, keyboards, desks, sinks and light switches," he noted.</p> <p>To get a handle on relative risk, between August 2020 and April 2021 Neitzel and his colleagues used air pumps and swabs in various locales across the locked-down campus.</p> <p>In all, more than 250 air samples were gathered, of which 1.6% tested positive for the virus that causes COVID. Of over 500 surface samples, 1.4% were positive.</p> <p>The most risky setting was the gym, with positive indications found for 75% of air samples and 50% of all surface samples. Most of the contaminated gym surfaces involved drinking fountain buttons; no samples taken from gym equipment turned up positive.</p> <p>Overall, far fewer positive readings were found in office spaces or around computer keyboards, light switches, tabletops, microwaves, fridge handles or student desks.</p>

But after stacking positive samples up against actual COVID cases on campus, the team determined that the probability of getting COVID after exposure to airborne virus particles was roughly 1 per 100 exposures.

The researchers determined the probability of illness from a contaminated surface to be 1 for every 100,000 exposures.

Still, Neitzel stressed that the findings reflect a time and place in which strict surface cleaning protocols were enforced, and when crowds were nonexistent. "Our results," he cautioned, "may not be completely representative of other community settings."

Nevertheless, the results suggest people should be more concerned about inhalation risks from the coronavirus than the risks from touching surfaces, "at least in an environment where surfaces are cleaned regularly, as was the case with our campus," Neitzel added.

Elizabeth Scott, a professor emerita at Simmons University in Boston, said "there has been a growing recognition that COVID-19 is predominantly airborne."

Yet Scott, who was not part of the study team, cautioned that "the relative importance of surface transmission may be higher in homes, dorms [or] where people are living together and repeatedly touching the same surfaces."

That kind of private space risk, she stressed, was not evaluated by the study. Also, it's important to note that "other respiratory viruses and other bacterial infections are spread predominantly via contact surfaces," added Scott, former co-director of the Simmons Center for Hygiene and Health in Home and Community.

In her view, "we need to continue effective and holistic hygiene practices for hands and surfaces, as well as respiratory and air hygiene, to protect against all the other community-borne infections that were an issue before COVID-19, and will be with us for the future," Scott said.

The findings were published April 27 in the Journal of Exposure Science & Environmental Epidemiology.

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HEADLINE	05/05 Summer travel: long lines, higher prices
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/finance/streettalk/summer-travel-leisure-covid-restrictions/2022/05/05/id/1068566/
GIST	<p>With more U.S. travelers expected to take to the skies and the roads this summer as COVID restrictions ease, unbridled demand will strain capacity in the leisure and travel industry and push prices even higher.</p> <p>Airlines, hotels, rental car companies and booking sites all reported a surge in demand for their services in the latest batch of company earnings. But at the same time, many of those companies face a tight labor market and limited volume as they scramble to restart and expand operations after more than two years of depressed demand due to the pandemic.</p> <p>Tripadvisor said travelers should expect inflation to impact all areas of travel purchases in 2022, and booking now versus later can mean locking in better prices.</p> <p>Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc plans to continue to reprice hotel rooms "every minute of the day" to limit the impact inflation has on its business, CEO Christopher Nassetta told investors on Tuesday.</p> <p>"As demand has picked up, we have certainly been able to do that and we expect that we will continue to be able to do that," he said on the company's earnings call.</p> <p>Hilton's average daily rates in the United States were 36.4% higher in the first quarter of 2022 compared to the same period in 2021. Average daily rates across hotel companies in the U.S. were up approximately</p>

37.7% in the first quarter of 2022 when compared to the same period in 2021, according to hotel industry data from Smith Travel Research Inc.

The price of flights this summer are also trending higher, according to travel search engine Skyscanner. Round trip flights within the U.S. will cost \$302 per traveler on average, which is 3% higher during the same period pre-pandemic. Long and ultra-long-haul international flights are up to 20% higher than 2019, costing on average \$797 and \$1182 respectively.

Other segments within the travel industry are facing supply constraints and labor shortages as leisure and business travelers also return.

Car rental firm Hertz Global Holdings reported it averaged about 481,000 vehicles during the first quarter of 2022 compared to a pre-pandemic level of approximately 700,000 vehicles.

"There's little question that as demand moves even higher in the summer season, you'll see stress further," said Hertz CEO Stephen Scherr, adding that the available supply of vehicles is limited and needs to be managed very carefully.

Staffing woes have also marred operations in recent weeks at carriers such as Alaska Airlines and JetBlue, forcing them to cut summer schedules to avoid further disruption.

Travel booking app Hopper said domestic airlines are currently scheduled to operate at between 75% to 95% of their 2019 summer capacity from May through August.

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) continues to host hiring events in an effort to increase staff ahead of anticipated summer travel and the return to pre-pandemic passenger volumes, according to a statement from the agency.

The TSA in March said the return of (fiscal year) 2019 passenger traffic levels would return in (fiscal year) 2022, a year earlier than previously projected and an increase in staff will help ensure that the "traveling public does not experience excessive wait times."

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HEADLINE	05/04 US steps up training Ukraine forces Europe
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/ukraine-russia-training-war/2022/05/04/id/1068550/
GIST	<p>U.S. defense officials said on Wednesday that the military is ramping up weapons training for Ukrainian forces, a process that involves temporarily taking them out of their country to train in various sites in Europe, The Hill reported.</p> <p>Lately, more than 220 Ukrainians have been trained for advanced artillery, a dozen on Switchblade drones, and 20 on the new Phoenix Ghost unmanned aerial system.</p> <p>And more than 50 Ukrainians will arrive at one of the sites to begin their training later this week, a senior defense official told The Hill.</p> <p>"We are running them through a streamlined course here on the new equipment that they'll be receiving. The goal in all of this is to get them back as soon as possible so that then they can train others within their army on the equipment," Gen. Joseph Hilbert, head of the 7th Army Training Command in Europe, told reporters on Tuesday.</p> <p>"They understand how to operate it and employ it as effectively as they can on their own and in accordance with their own tactics and their own doctrine," Hilbert said of the weapons and equipment. "The soldiers that we are receiving here are absolutely motivated, incredibly professional."</p>

	<p>According to Hilbert, the U.S. has trained close to 23,000 Ukrainian soldiers and conducted more than a dozen large war drills with U.S. troops in Germany since 2015, costing the government \$126 million.</p> <p>The training began a year after Russian President Vladimir Putin annexed the Crimea Peninsula and during the Ukrainian war over the Donbas against pro-Kremlin separatists.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/05 Ukraine repels Russian attacks
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/headline/mariupol-steel-plant-battle-ukraine/2022/05/05/id/1068568/
GIST	<p>Ukraine's military said Thursday that it recaptured some areas in the south and repelled Russian attacks in the east, as a bloody battle raged at a steel mill in Mariupol where Ukrainian troops are holed up in tunnels and bunkers, fending off a Russian onslaught.</p> <p>Ten weeks into a devastating war, Ukrainian and Russian forces are fighting village by village, as Moscow struggles to gain momentum in the eastern industrial heartland of the Donbas. Russia switched its focus to that region — where Moscow-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian forces for years — after a stiffer than expected resistance bogged its troops down and thwarted its initial goal of overrunning the capital.</p> <p>In an interview with The Associated Press on Thursday, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko said he hadn't expected the Russian offensive to "drag on this way." Some Russian troops used ally Belarus as a launch pad for the invasion on Feb. 24, and Lukashenko publicly supported the operation.</p> <p>"But I am not immersed in this problem enough to say whether it goes according to plan, like the Russians say, or like I feel it," the authoritarian leader said. He added it would be "unacceptable" to use nuclear weapons, but he couldn't say if Russia has such plans.</p> <p>In addition to heavy shelling of the Donbas, Russian forces also kept up their bombardment of railroad stations and other supply-line targets across the country — part of an effort to disrupt the supply of Western arms, which have been critical to Ukraine's defense.</p> <p>Ukrainian forces said Thursday they made some gains on the border of the southern regions of Kherson and Mykolaiv and repelled 11 Russian attacks in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions that make up the Donbas.</p> <p>Five people were killed and at least 25 more wounded in shelling of cities in the Donbas over the past 24 hours, Ukrainian officials said. The attacks damaged houses and a school as well.</p> <p>Air raid sirens sounded in cities across the country on Wednesday night, while Russian attacks were reported near Kyiv, the capital; in Cherkasy and Dnipro in central Ukraine; and in Zaporizhzhia in the southeast. In Dnipro, authorities said a rail facility was hit — following several earlier attacks on railway stations across the country. The sirens sounded anew early Thursday in the western city of Lviv, which has been a gateway for western arms and served as a relative safe haven for people fleeing fighting farther east.</p> <p>An assessment by the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said Russian forces were struggling to gain traction.</p> <p>"Ukrainian defenses have largely stalled Russian advances in eastern Ukraine," it said late Wednesday.</p> <p>"Russian forces intensified airstrikes against transportation infrastructure in western Ukraine (on Wednesday) but remain unable to interdict Western aid shipments to Ukraine," it added.</p> <p>In the most searing example of how Ukrainian forces have slowed Russia's progress, Ukrainian fighters held out at the sprawling Azovstal steel mill in Mariupol — the last pocket of resistance in a city that is otherwise controlled by Moscow's forces.</p>

“With the support of aircraft, the enemy resumed the offensive in order to take control of the plant,” the Ukrainian military's General Staff said Thursday. A stream of black smoke rose above the plant on Wednesday.

The Ukrainians said Russian forces have pushed into the plant's perimeter and were also bombing it from above. The Kremlin denied that there was any ground assault.

Denys Prokopenko, commander of the Ukrainian Azov regiment that's defending the plant, said in a video posted Wednesday that the incursions continued for a second day, “and there are heavy, bloody battles.”

Mariupol's fall would deprive Ukraine of a vital port, allow Russia to establish a land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014, and free up troops to fight elsewhere in the Donbas.

The city, and the plant in particular, have come to symbolize the misery inflicted by the war. The Russians have pulverized most of Mariupol in a two-month siege that has trapped civilians with little food, water, medicine or heat. Civilians holed up inside the plant have perhaps suffered even more. About 100 of them were evacuated over the weekend — the first time some saw daylight in months.

The Russian government said it would open another evacuation corridor from the plant during certain hours on Thursday through Saturday. But there was no immediate confirmation of those arrangements from other parties, and many previous assurances from the Kremlin have fallen through, with the Ukrainians blaming continued fighting by the Russians.

It is unclear how many Ukrainian fighters are still inside the plant, but the Russians put the number at about 2,000 in recent weeks, and 500 were reported to be wounded. A few hundred civilians also remain there, the Ukrainian side said this week.

The United Nations announced that more than 300 civilians were evacuated Wednesday from Mariupol and other nearby communities. The evacuees arrived in Zaporizhzhia, about 140 miles (230 kilometers) to the northwest, where they were receiving humanitarian assistance.

“Many came with nothing but the clothes they were wearing, and we will now support them during this difficult time, including with much-needed psychological support,” said Osnat Lubrani, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Belarus announced the start of military exercises Wednesday. A top Ukrainian official said the country will be ready to act if Belarus joins the fighting.

The British Defense Ministry said Thursday that it does not anticipate that the drills currently posed a threat to Ukraine, but that Moscow will likely use them “to fix Ukrainian forces in the north, preventing them from being committed to the battle for the Donbas.”

In addition to supplying weapons to Ukraine, Europe and the U.S. have sought to punish Moscow with sanctions, taking aim at the country's vital energy sector. The European Union's top official called on the 27-nation bloc on Wednesday to ban Russian oil imports, a crucial source of revenue.

The proposal needs unanimous approval from EU countries and is likely to be debated fiercely. Hungary and Slovakia have already said they won't take part in any oil sanctions, but they could be granted an exemption.

The EU is also talking about a possible embargo on Russian natural gas. The bloc has already approved a cutoff of coal imports.

HEADLINE	05/05 Belarus admits Russia war 'drags on'
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-europe-belarus-alexander-lukashenko-9bc1f6524eb65841b924883705684b7f
GIST	<p>MINSK, Belarus (AP) — Belarus' authoritarian leader said that he didn't expect Russia's "operation" in Ukraine to drag on for so long and claimed he was doing "everything" to stop the war, in an interview with The Associated Press on Thursday.</p> <p>President Alexander Lukashenko defended Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which began on Feb. 24. However, he said he didn't think it would "drag on this way."</p> <p>"But I am not immersed in this problem enough to say whether it goes according to plan, like the Russians say, or like I feel it. I want to stress one more time, I feel like this operation has dragged on," Lukashenko said during the nearly 90-minute interview at the Independence Palace in Minsk.</p> <p>He also alleged that Ukraine was "provoking Russia" and insisted that Belarus stands for peace.</p> <p>"We categorically do not accept any war. We have done and are doing everything now so that there isn't a war. Thanks to yours truly, me that is, negotiations between Ukraine and Russia have begun," he said.</p> <p>"But why is Ukraine, on whose territory a war in effect is ongoing, military action, people are dying — why is Ukraine not interested in these negotiations?"</p> <p>Lukashenko also said it would be "unacceptable" to use nuclear weapons, but he couldn't say if Russia has such plans.</p> <p>"Not only is the use of nuclear weapons unacceptable because it's right next to us — we are not across the ocean like the United States. It is also unacceptable because it might knock our terrestrial ball flying off the orbit to who knows where," Lukashenko said. "Whether or not Russia is capable of that — is a question you need to ask the Russian leadership."</p> <p>Russia deployed forces to Belarusian territory under the pretext of military drills and then sent them rolling into Ukraine as part of the invasion that began on Feb. 24.</p> <p>Lukashenko publicly supported the operation, alleging at a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in early March that Ukraine planned to attack Belarus and that Moscow's offensive prevented that. He said he brought a map to show Putin from where the alleged attack was supposed to take place, but offered no other evidence to back the claim.</p> <p>Lukashenko also told the AP that Putin isn't seeking a direct conflict with NATO, and urged the West to ensure that one doesn't happen.</p> <p>"He most likely does not want a global confrontation with NATO. Use it. Use it and do everything for that not to happen. Otherwise, even if Putin doesn't want it, the military will react," the Belarusian leader said.</p> <p>Earlier this week, Belarusian military announced snap drills that raised concerns in Ukraine. However, Lukashenko assured the AP on Thursday that the drills didn't threaten anyone.</p> <p>"We do not threaten anyone and we are not going to threaten and will not do it. Moreover, we can't threaten -- we know who opposes us, so to unleash some kind of a conflict, some kind of war here in the West is absolutely not in the interests of the Belarusian state. So the West can sleep peacefully."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Major meatpacker: steak prices keep rising
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/major-u-beefpacker-says-steak-225637711.html

GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- Beef will be getting even more expensive at U.S. grocery stores in the months ahead, according to one of the country's biggest meatpackers.</p> <p>National Beef Co., controlled by the Brazilian giant Marfrig Global Foods, sees relatively stable margins in the next two quarters, according to Tim Klein, who heads Marfrig's U.S. operations. That means even though their costs to buy cattle are increasing, the company will ultimately be able to pass that on to consumers in the form of pricier steaks and burgers.</p> <p>"Cattle prices will go up, and beef prices will go up with them," Klein said during an earnings interview.</p> <p>The cost of meat has been a focus as consumers grapple with the fastest inflation in four decades. The average price for ground beef in America grocery stores has jumped 18% from a year ago, according to the government data.</p> <p>American shoppers may adapt to inflation by switching to less expensive cuts, according to Klein.</p> <p>Marfrig beat analysts' estimates for earnings before items and revenue, posting a record for a first quarter. U.S. operations drove the gains, while South America's unit started a recovery amid booming Chinese demand and improving cattle supply in Brazil, according to Miguel Gulate, who heads operations in the region. Marfrig's slaughterings in Brazil rose 20% in the quarter, the double compared with the industry average, Gulate said.</p> <p>Net income fell 61% from a year ago due to a non-cash loss on the mark-to-market of its stake in the food giant BRF SA. Starting next quarter, Marfrig will add BRF earnings to its balance sheet, according to Chief Financial Officer Tang David. Last month, Marfrig's founder, Marcos Molina dos Santos, was elected BRF chairman.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Unthinkable: Covid death toll surpasses 1M
SOURCE	https://www.cnbc.com/2022/05/04/covid-deaths-top-1-million-in-us-nbc-news-tally-shows.html
GIST	<p>The United States on Wednesday surpassed 1 million Covid-19 deaths, according to data compiled by NBC News — a once unthinkable scale of loss even for the country with the world's highest recorded toll from the virus.</p> <p>The number — equivalent to the population of San Jose, California, the 10th largest city in the U.S. — was reached at stunning speed: 27 months after the country confirmed its first case of the virus.</p> <p>"Each of those people touched hundreds of other people," said Diana Ordonez, whose husband, Juan Ordonez, died in April 2020 at age 40, five days before their daughter Mia's fifth birthday. "It's an exponential number of other people that are walking around with a small hole in their heart."</p> <p>While deaths from Covid have slowed in recent weeks, about 360 people have still been dying every day. The casualty count is far higher than what most people could have imagined in the early days of the pandemic, particularly because former President Donald Trump repeatedly downplayed the virus while in office.</p> <p>"This is their new hoax," Trump said of Democrats in front of a cheering crowd at a rally in North Charleston, South Carolina, on Feb. 28, 2020. "So far we have lost nobody to coronavirus."</p> <p>A day later, health officials in Washington made the inevitable announcement: a coronavirus patient in their state had died.</p> <p>Now, more than two years and 999,999 fatalities later, the U.S. death toll is the world's highest total by a significant margin, figures show. In a distant second is Brazil, which has recorded just over 660,000 confirmed Covid deaths.</p>

Dr. [Christopher Murray](#), who heads the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington School of Medicine, said although this milestone has been looming, “the fact that so many have died is still appalling.”

And the toll continues to mount.

“This is far from over,” Murray said.

Each death causes a ripple of lasting pain. Diana Ordonez’s husband worked in information security management and had just gotten promoted before he died. When he wasn’t working, he loved to be with his family.

For their daughter, Mia, now 7, losing her dad has brought anxiety, overwhelming sadness, sleep trouble and lots of questions. Ordonez, 35, of Waldwick, New Jersey, doesn’t always have answers.

“I try to be understanding, but I definitely have felt so many times that I’m not equipped to parent this person,” she said.

She finds times of joy are tinged with sadness, too.

“It is shadowed by, ‘God, I wish he was here for this,’” Ordonez said. “It could be simple moments, like watching Mia at ballet, or going to a birthday party and watching her jump up and down, holding hands with her friend.”

‘We had the opportunity to be a shining example’

Many see America’s staggering death toll as evidence of its inadequate response to the crisis.

“We had the opportunity to be a shining example to the rest of the world about how to deal with the pandemic, and we didn’t do that,” said Nico Montero, a 17-year-old in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Montero [made headlines earlier this year](#) when he traveled to Philadelphia, where children ages 11 or older can be vaccinated without parental consent, to receive his shot at age 16.

Dr. Robert Murphy, executive director of the Havey Institute for Global Health at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine, said many expected the U.S. to better control the virus’s spread.

“We were very encouraged by the rapid development of the vaccines, and everybody really thought we were going to vaccinate our way out of this,” he said. “But then we had people that wouldn’t even take the damn vaccine.”

Steven Ho, 32, was an emergency room technician in Los Angeles when the pandemic began. He said he thinks changing guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confused the public, while disputes over vaccines and masks cost lives.

“We just didn’t do a good job,” he said.

Ho quit his hospital job last year — one of many health care workers who have done so. A recent [study](#) calculated that about 3.2 percent of health care workers left the industry per month before the pandemic. That share jumped to 5.6 percent from April to December 2020. Relative to February 2020, the health care workforce has lost nearly 300,000 employees, the [U.S. Department of Labor reported](#) April 1. Ho decided to become a comedian. Combining his experience treating Covid patients with comedy, he donned his hospital scrubs to create a popular series of TikTok videos called [“Tips From the Emergency Room.”](#)

It was Ho’s way of coping with what he had witnessed.

“It helped me release this pent-up energy, anger and sadness,” he said.

A pandemic that continued long after the advent of vaccines

More than half of U.S. Covid deaths have occurred since President Joe Biden was inaugurated in January 2021.

Most of those deaths — more than 80 percent between April and December 2021, for instance — were unvaccinated Americans, according to the [CDC](#). As of February, the risk of death from Covid was [20 times higher](#) for unvaccinated people than for those who were vaccinated and boosted, the CDC data showed.

“We know vaccines work. We know masks work. We know social distancing works, and we know crowd control, limiting crowded spaces, works. This is like a no-brainer, but we cannot seem to do it,” Murphy said.

Sherie Hellams Gamble — whose mother, [Patricia Edwards](#), died of Covid in August 2020 — worries about the effects of the ongoing pandemic on health care workers. Edwards, 62, was an intensive care unit nurse for three decades who treated her patients as if they were family, her daughter said.

“I still talk to people that were working with her. I always find myself saying, ‘Please be careful. I’m thinking about you,’” Gamble, of Greenville, South Carolina, said. “Two years later and they’re still in the fight — I know that cannot be easy.”

Nine months after Edwards died, she was recognized with a [lifetime achievement award in nursing](#). Gamble said it was bittersweet to accept the award on her mother’s behalf.

“It solidified her work that she’s done,” Gamble said.

The family created a [scholarship](#) in the hopes of bringing more nurses like Edwards into the field. Gamble said she imagines that if Edwards were still alive today, she would likely be telling everyone to take care of themselves.

“She would probably be saying, ‘Not only does your health affect you, but it affects other people, so do what you can do to keep yourself healthy,’” she said.

Gamble is certain her mom would have another reminder, too: “Don’t take for granted life and the days you are still here on Earth.”

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HEADLINE	05/04 Pope warns pro-war Russia patriarch
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/04/europe/pope-francis-patriarch-kirill-ukraine-invasion-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>Rome (CNN)Pope Francis warned the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, not to become "Putin's altar boy," he said in an interview this week.</p> <p>In his strongest words to date against the pro-war Patriarch, Francis also slammed Kirill for endorsing Russia's stated reasons for invading Ukraine.</p> <p>"I spoke to him for 40 minutes via Zoom," the Pope told Italian daily Corriere della Sera in an interview published Tuesday. "The first 20 minutes he read to me, with a card in hand, all the justifications for war."</p> <p>"I listened and told him: I don't understand anything about this," said the Pope. "Brother, we are not clerics of state, we cannot use the language of politics but that of Jesus."</p> <p>"The Patriarch cannot transform himself into Putin's altar boy," the Pope said.</p>

Francis said the conference call with Kirill took place on March 16, and that both he and the Patriarch had agreed to postpone a planned meeting on June 14 in Jerusalem.

"It would be our second face-to-face meeting, nothing to do with the war," the Pope said. "But now, he too agrees: let's stop, it could be an ambiguous signal."

The Russian Orthodox Church said the Pope's comments were "regrettable," in a statement Wednesday.

"It is regrettable that a month and a half after the conversation with Patriarch Kirill, Pope Francis has chosen the wrong tone for conveying the contents of the conversation," said the Department of External Relations of the Russian Patriarchate.

"Such declarations do not contribute to establishing a constructive dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church which is particularly necessary at this time," the statement reads.

Also on Wednesday it emerged that the Patriarch is among the individuals who will be included in the proposed sixth round of European Union sanctions against Russia, according to two sources who have seen the full documents.

The proposed draft has been sent to the corresponding ambassadors for review, the sources said.

At this stage names can be taken off or added at member state discretion, an EU Commission source said.

Russian Orthodox Church Spokesman Vladimir Legoida said the sanctions were out of touch with "common sense," reported Russian state news agency TASS.

"The more indiscriminate [these] sanctions become, the more they lose touch with common sense and the harder it becomes to reach peace, which is what the Russian Orthodox Church prays for at every service with the blessing of His Holiness the Patriarch, and assistance to all those affected by the Ukrainian conflict, only serve to affirm his words," Legoida said in a Telegram post on Wednesday.

"Only those completely ignorant of the history of our Church can seek to intimidate its clergy and believers by compiling some lists," Legoida said.

In March the Patriarch said that the conflict was an extension of a fundamental culture clash between the wider Russian world and Western liberal values, exemplified by expressions of gay pride.

Experts say that Kirill's comments offer important insights into Putin's larger spiritual vision of a return to a Russian Empire, in which the Orthodox religion plays a pivotal role.

But the hardline stance of the Russian patriarch is costing him followers.

In March the Russian Orthodox church in Amsterdam announced it was severing ties with the leader, joining a growing number of priests and churches who are abandoning Moscow over the war in Ukraine.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Impact of Fed interest rate rise
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/federal-reserve-interest-rate-increase-how-much-will-it-cost/
GIST	The Federal Reserve is turning to its most potent weapon to combat the highest inflation in 40 years: Boosting interest rates. On Wednesday, the central bank said it is increasing its benchmark short-term interest rate by 0.5%, marking the largest increase since 2000.

The Fed's goal is to tamp down demand from consumers and businesses for goods and services. By boosting rates, the thinking goes, it will become more expensive to borrow money to buy a home, car or other needs, prompting some people to hold off on purchases. A drop in demand could help tame inflation, which accelerated to [8.5% in March](#), the highest increase since 1981.

The move shouldn't come as a complete shock to consumers and businesses, given that the Fed already boosted rates by [a quarter point](#) in March and signaled that more hikes would be coming. At the same time, Americans have become used to low interest rates for everything from home-buying to auto loans. A half-point hike, or 0.50%, could translate into higher costs that could take a bite out of your budget.

"For the first time in 22 years, the Federal Reserve is poised to raise interest rates by more than a one-quarter percentage point increment," said Greg McBride, chief financial analyst at Bankrate, in an email prior to the Fed announcement. "This hints at the steps households should be taking to stabilize their finances — pay down debt, especially costly credit card and other variable rate debt, and boost emergency savings."

To be sure, even with the biggest interest rate hike since 2000 — when the U.S. was in the midst of the dot-com bubble — rates remain historically low. With the boost, the federal funds rate will likely sit at 1%, compared with 6.5% when the central bank last raised rates by the same amount in 2000, according to [data](#) compiled by Bankrate.

Here's what the increase will mean for your wallet.

What will the rate hike cost you?

Every 0.25% increase equates to an extra \$25 a year in interest for \$10,000 in debt. So a 50 basis point increase will translate into an extra \$50 of interest for every \$10,000 in debt.

However, economists don't expect the Fed to stop raising rates after Wednesday's announcement. Economists are forecasting the Federal Reserve will direct another 50 basis point increase in June, with additional increases to follow later in 2022.

By year-end, the federal funds rate could reach 2% or higher, according to LendingTree Senior Economic Analyst Jacob Channel. That implies a rate increase of about 1.5% from current levels, which means consumers could pay \$150 in additional interest for every \$10,000 in debt.

Credit cards, home equity lines of credit

Many consumers will feel the pinch via their credit cards, according to LendingTree credit expert Matt Schulz.

"Your credit card debt is going to get more expensive in a hurry, and it's not going to stop anytime soon," Schulz said in an email.

Expect to see higher APRs in a billing cycle or two after the Fed's announcement, he added. After the Fed's March hike, interest rates for credit cards increased across 75% of the 200 cards that Schulz reviews every month, he said.

"Most Americans' financial margin for error is small, and when gas, groceries and seemingly everything else gets more expensive and interest rates go up, too, it makes it much harder," he wrote. "Now is the time for those with credit card debt to focus on knocking it down."

For instance, consider a 0% balance transfer credit card or a low-interest personal loan. Consumers can also call their credit card companies and ask for a lower rate, which is frequently a successful approach, he added.

Other types of credit with adjustable rates may also see an impact, such as home equity lines of credit and adjustable-rate mortgages, which are based on the prime rate. Auto loans may also rise, although these can be more sensitive to competition for buyers, which could dampen the Fed hike's impact.

Will mortgage rates continue to rise?

Homebuyers have already been walloped by surging mortgage rates, which have jumped about two percentage points in one year, topping 5%.

That's adding [thousands to the annual cost](#) of buying a home. For instance, a purchaser buying a \$250,000 home with a 30-year fixed loan at last week's average rate of 5.3% will pay \$3,300 a year more compared to what they would have paid with the same mortgage in April 2021, according to figures from the National Association of Realtors.

But the Fed's rate hike might not translate into an immediate increase for mortgage rates, LendingTree's Channel said.

"In fact, this latest rate hike could already be baked into mortgage rates which are currently sitting at an average 5.10% for a 30-year, fixed rate mortgage," he noted. "With that said, rates have risen very dramatically this year, and they could go even higher."

Savings accounts, CDs

If there's an upside for consumers, it's that savings accounts and certificates of deposit could provide higher yields.

"Rate increases are likely to accelerate after the highly anticipated May Fed rate hike," said Ken Tumin of DepositAccounts.com in an email.

In April, the average yields of accounts from online banks increased 4 basis points to 0.54% for savings accounts, while 5-year CDs rose 47 basis points to 1.7%.

While that's a better yield for savers, it's nevertheless problematic in a high inflation period. Even with those higher rates, savers are essentially eroding the value of their money by socking it into a savings account while inflation is running above 8%.

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HEADLINE	05/04 US officials: Putin hits peak desperation
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/biden-officials-warn-of-new-ukraine-nightmare-as-vladimir-putin-hits-peak-desperation?ref=home
GIST	<p>It is day 70 of Putin's war in Ukraine, but at least in Russia, the war isn't official just yet—Russian leadership has continued to tout the invasion as a “special military operation.”</p> <p>But that might all change on Victory Day, the day Russia celebrates the Soviet Union's victory in World War II. Russian President Vladimir Putin is preparing to declare war against Ukraine on Victory Day, May 9, western and Ukrainian officials believe.</p> <p>Putin will be declaring a full mobilization for war on May 9, Ukraine's top military spy, Kyrylo Budanov, predicted this week. U.S. officials are also warning that Russia could declare war as soon as May 9, CNN reported.</p> <p>Some senior U.S. officials fear Putin will massively escalate attacks on Ukraine in the coming days. Senior Biden administration officials are growing increasingly concerned that Putin is growing desperate to declare any sort of win in Ukraine as Victory Day approaches.</p>

“He needs a victory to survive,” one senior administration official told The Daily Beast. “A repeat of [the Soviet loss in] Afghanistan is literally an existential threat to a regime that is built on the idea that a strongman leader can revive the glory of the Russian empire.”

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to speak candidly, said that the pressure to “deliver a victory, any kind of victory,” could set into motion an unprecedented escalation.

[Putin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has denied](#) Russia would announce mobilization or officially declare war on Ukraine on Victory Day.

Some of the day’s “festivities” could tout seeming successes of the invasion into Ukraine as a way to bolster support back home—either just to show off some alleged wins to justify the invasion or to garner support for further escalation.

The pomp and circumstance could include the twisted plan to present [500 Ukrainian prisoners of war during a parade](#) to show Russia’s military might in comparison to Ukraine’s, according to a report from Russian human rights project “[Gulagu.net](#).” Putin is also reportedly considering holding sham trials of Ukrainians that Russia has claimed have been supportive of Nazis, in an imitation of the Nuremberg trials that worked to hold German Nazi leadership accountable.

The warnings of Russia’s plans come as Russian forces are suffering massive losses—as of Wednesday, Russia has lost 24,500 troops, according to the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. And the [Russian military has been struggling to keep its manpower](#) up to the task, working to recruit more people to join up, without much success.

Declaring war more formally would allow Russia to tap into reserve forces to swell its military operation on the ground in Ukraine to reach for a more decisive victory.

The symbolic Victory Day comes at a moment where Putin needs all the help he can get after his forces have been faltering for weeks. After his troops failed to take Kyiv and achieve some of his more ambitious goals in Ukraine, [Russian forces have had to retreat and replenish their supplies](#) to go after Eastern Ukraine, in a kind of plan B for Russia. And while fighting continues in Eastern Ukraine, the delay in rerouting plans towards the east has allowed Ukraine to build up its weaponry to try to more effectively thwart Russian attacks, which may put Russia at a disadvantage for some time, Rob Lee, a Russian military analyst, told The Daily Beast.

“I don’t think time is on Russia’s side, as Ukraine receives more modern weapons [such as] the howitzers,” Lee, a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, told The Daily Beast. “I think Ukraine is going to be in a stronger position in a few weeks relative to today.”

The symbolic nature of Victory Day could serve as the ideal platform for Putin to pepper Russians with more propaganda on the invasion in Ukraine to garner support for a larger scale mobilization. But selling a more full-hearted mobilization domestically might be difficult, given that Russia has been suggesting that the “special” operation is going well.

“I’m quite curious,” Budanov said. “How will they explain this to their own people? Why does Russia, with its, as they say, the first or second army in the world, need mobilization, when, according to their official reports, everything is going according to plan and Ukraine as a military machine is nothing?”

The date could, of course, have no bearing on whether Putin declares war. The future of Putin’s war in Ukraine will depend on what happens on the ground in Eastern Ukraine, not a date, Michael Kofman, the research program director in the Russia Studies Program at CNA, a Virginia-based national security research organization, told The Daily Beast.

“The political leadership [will] assess the current situation in Donbas and their likelihood of achieving their goals by this campaign,” Kofman said. “Right now it’s still unclear if the Russian offensive is going

very slowly because they're meeting far more resistance than they expected, because their forces are much weaker now, or are they actually prosecuting this more methodically and more carefully to preserve the force."

And Russian forces aren't doing so hot in Eastern Ukraine, a senior U.S. defense official said in a briefing Monday.

"They still have not solved all their logistics problem, and quite frankly, there's... a risk and casualty aversion that we continue to see by the Russians now, not just in the air, but on the ground," the senior U.S. defense official said. The Russians are being "very, very cautious, very tepid."

Pulling out all the stops for Ukraine, in any case, might be political suicide for Putin, warned Lee. After mobilizing for a war, the expectations of successes from Ukraine might be higher—successes the Russian military hasn't proved it can achieve. And if conscripts die in large numbers, upheaval about Putin's decisions might mount.

"With volunteers... it's a bit of a different scenario where Russians can say, 'ok you chose to join, you chose to serve,'" Lee told The Daily Beast. "If you mobilize it means you need to achieve something more, because then the stakes are raised higher. And if you start sending conscripts to war, they start getting killed in large numbers, that becomes a really big political risk."

U.S. officials have warned Victory Day might not be the endgame for Putin, as well, and have been fuzzy on the date at which Putin might make his next big move in Ukraine. Sometime around mid-May, for instance, Putin will likely try to annex portions of Eastern Ukraine as well as Kherson, Michael Carpenter, the U.S. Ambassador to Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, predicted this week.

The intelligence on the plans is "highly credible," Carpenter said.

"We believe that Russia will try to annex the Donetsk 'people's republic' and Luhansk 'people's republic'... to Russia," Carpenter said Monday in a briefing with reporters. "I cannot speak to whether Russia will be able to execute on its planning, but this is the planning that we are seeing."

Budanov, Ukraine defense intelligence chief, however, warned that the Russian military is eyeing victory on May 9 in Eastern Ukraine in the Donbas.

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HEADLINE	05/04 CDC: Covid hospitalizations, deaths to rise
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/covid-19-hospital-admissions-deaths-forecasted-rise-us/story?id=84498664
GIST	<p>For the first time in months, daily hospital admission levels and new COVID-19 related deaths in the United States are both projected to increase over the next four weeks, according to updated forecast models used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>The projected increases come after weeks of steady upticks in infections across the country, subsequent to the removal of masking requirements and mitigation measures in many states and cities.</p> <p>The forecast now predicts that approximately 5,000 deaths will occur over the next two weeks, with Ohio, New York, and New Jersey projected to see the largest totals of daily deaths in the weeks to come.</p> <p>"We are still in the middle of a pandemic, to be sure—there's no confusion about that," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, told Foreign Policy last week.</p> <p>The forecast models show that 42 states and territories in hospital admissions across the country, including New York, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Florida, are projected to see increases in the next two weeks.</p>

Nationally, a growing number of COVID-19 positive patients have already been admitted to hospitals, requiring care, federal data shows.

Since late last month, daily hospital admission totals have been slowly increasing, particularly in the Northeast, [according to CDC data](#). And in the last week, admissions have jumped by 20%, with emergency department visits also up by 18%.

On average, more than 2,200 virus-positive Americans are entering the hospital each day -- a total that has increased by 20% in the last week, the CDC reports. This also marks the highest number of patients requiring care since mid-March.

Overall, there are about 18,300 patients with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in hospitals across the country, up by 18% in the last two weeks, the Department of Health and Human Services [reports](#).

Although totals remain significantly lower than during other parts of the pandemic, admission levels are now on the rise in every region of the country.

Nationally, new infection rates have reached their highest point in nearly two months. More than 60,000 new cases are being officially reported each day, up by 27% in the last week, according to the CDC.

In the Northeast and New York-New Jersey region, infection rates have risen by 64.8% and 54.8% respectively, over the last two weeks.

Since last summer, dozens of states have moved to shutter public testing sites, with more at-home COVID-19 tests now available. Most Americans are not reporting their results to officials, and thus, experts say infection totals are likely significantly undercounted.

Health experts say a confluence of factors is likely driving the nation's latest viral resurgence, including the easing of masking requirements and other COVID-19 restrictions as well as highly contagious omicron subvariants, which have been estimated to be between 30% and 80% more transmissible than the original omicron strain.

The BA.2 subvariant, BA.2.12.1, first discovered domestically last month, in New York state, continues to steadily increase in the U.S., newly released federal data shows. The subvariant now accounts for 36.5% of new COVID-19 cases nationwide, while in the New York — New Jersey area, it accounts for the majority — nearly 62% — of new cases.

With vaccine immunity waning and the presence of variants of concern growing, health officials continue to urge the public to get vaccinated and boosted to prevent the risk of severe disease and hospitalization.

“We hope that we don’t see a major uptick [in cases] as we get into the fall, but that remains to be seen. We’re going to have to wait and see, which is the reason why we’re still encouraging people to get vaccinated,” Fauci said last week. “If you’ve not been vaccinated or if you have been vaccinated and are eligible for a booster, make sure to get it now.”

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HEADLINE	05/04 Ukraine: Russia using ‘missile terrorism’
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukraine-hopes-evacuations-besieged-steel-mill-84486729
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine -- Complaining that the West is "stuffing Ukraine with weapons," Russia bombarded railroad stations and other supply-line targets across the country, as the European Union moved to further punish Moscow for the war Wednesday by proposing a ban on oil imports.</p> <p>Heavy fighting also raged at the Azovstal steel mill in Mariupol that represented the last stronghold of Ukrainian resistance in the ruined southern port city, according to the mayor. A Russian official denied</p>

that Moscow's troops were storming the plant, but the commander of the main Ukrainian military unit inside said Russian troops had broken into the mill's territory.

The Russian military also said it used sea- and air-launched missiles to destroy electric power facilities at five railway stations across Ukraine, while artillery and aircraft also struck troop strongholds and fuel and ammunition depots.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba accused Russia of “resorting to the missile terrorism tactics in order to spread fear across Ukraine.”

Air raid sirens sounded in cities across the country on Wednesday night, and attacks were reported near Kyiv, the capital; in Cherkasy and Dnipro in central Ukraine; and in Zaporizhzhia in the southeast. In Dnipro, authorities said a rail facility was hit. Videos on social media suggested a bridge there was attacked.

There was no immediate word on casualties or the extent of the damage.

Responding to the strikes in his nightly video address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said: “All of these crimes will be answered, legally and quite practically – on the battlefield.”

The flurry of attacks comes as Russia prepares to celebrate Victory Day on May 9, marking the Soviet Union’s defeat of Nazi Germany. The world is watching for whether Russian President Vladimir Putin will use the occasion to declare a victory in Ukraine or expand what he calls the “special military operation.”

A declaration of all-out war would allow Putin to introduce martial law and mobilize reservists to make up for significant troop losses.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov dismissed the speculation as “nonsense.”

Meanwhile, Belarus, which Russia used as a staging ground for its invasion, announced the start of military exercises Wednesday. A top Ukrainian official said the country will be ready to act if Belarus joins the fighting.

The attacks on rail infrastructure were meant to disrupt the delivery of Western weapons, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said. Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said the West is “stuffing Ukraine with weapons.”

A senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the Pentagon's assessment, said that while the Russians have tried to hit critical infrastructure around the western city of Lviv, specifically targeting railroads, there has been “no appreciable impact” on Ukraine’s effort to resupply its forces. Lviv, close to the Polish border, has been a major gateway for NATO-supplied weapons.

Weaponry pouring into Ukraine helped its forces thwart Russia’s initial drive to seize Kyiv and seems certain to play a central role in the growing battle for the Donbas, the eastern industrial region that Moscow now says is its main objective.

Ukraine has urged the West to ramp up the supply of weapons ahead of that potentially decisive clash. Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany, which had been slow at first to help arm Ukraine, said his government is considering supplying howitzers, in addition to Gepard anti-aircraft guns and other equipment it has agreed to send.

The governor of the eastern Donetsk region, which lies in the Donbas, said Russian attacks left 21 people dead on Tuesday, the highest number of known fatalities since April 8, when a missile attack on the railway station in Kramatorsk killed at least 59.

In addition to supplying weapons to Ukraine, Europe and the U.S. have sought to punish Moscow with sanctions. The EU's top official called on the 27-nation bloc on Wednesday to ban Russian oil imports, a crucial source of revenue.

“We will make sure that we phase out Russian oil in an orderly fashion, in a way that allows us and our partners to secure alternative supply routes and minimizes the impact on global markets,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France.

The proposal needs unanimous approval from EU countries and is likely to be the subject of fierce debate. Hungary and Slovakia have already said they won't take part in any oil sanctions. They could be granted an exemption.

The EU is also talking about a possible embargo on Russian natural gas. The bloc has already approved a cutoff of coal imports.

Russia's economy is heavily dependent on oil and natural gas exports. Kuleba, the Ukrainian foreign minister, said European purchases of Russian energy produce billions in revenue and support the Kremlin's “war machine.”

Von der Leyen also proposed that Sberbank, Russia's largest bank, and two other major banks be disconnected from the SWIFT international banking payment system.

In Mariupol, Mayor Vadym Boychenko said that Russian forces were targeting the already shattered Azovstal plant with heavy artillery, tanks, aircraft, warships and “heavy bombs that pierce concrete 3 to 5 meters thick.”

“Our brave guys are defending this fortress, but it is very difficult,” he said.

Ukrainian fighters said Tuesday that Russian forces had begun storming the plant. But the Kremlin said that was not true. “There is no assault,” Peskov said.

Denys Prokopenko, commander of the Ukrainian Azov regiment that's defending the plant, said Russian forces have broken into the plant's territory.

Prokopenko said in a video that the incursions continued for a second day, “and there are heavy, bloody battles.”

“The situation is extremely difficult, but in spite of everything, we continue to carry out the order to hold the defense,” he added.

His wife, Kateryna Prokopenko, told The Associated Press: “We don't want them to die. They won't surrender. They are waiting for the bravest countries to evacuate them.”

Meanwhile, the United Nations announced that more than 300 civilians were evacuated Wednesday from Mariupol and other nearby communities. The evacuees arrived in Zaporizhzhia, about 140 miles (230 kilometers) to the northwest, where they were receiving humanitarian assistance.

“Many came with nothing but the clothes they were wearing, and we will now support them during this difficult time, including with much-needed psychological support,” said Osnat Lubrani, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Ukraine.

Over the weekend, more than 100 people — including women, the elderly and 17 children — were evacuated from the plant during a cease-fire in an operation overseen by the U.N. and the Red Cross. But the attacks on the plant soon resumed.

	<p>The Russian government said on the Telegram messaging app that it would open another evacuation corridor from the plant during certain hours on Thursday through Saturday. But there was no immediate confirmation of those arrangements from other parties, and many previous such assurances from the Kremlin have fallen through, with the Ukrainians blaming continued fighting by the Russians.</p> <p>It was unclear how many Ukrainian fighters were still inside, but the Russians put the number at about 2,000 in recent weeks, and 500 were reported to be wounded. A few hundred civilians also remained there, the Ukrainian side said.</p> <p>Mariupol, and the plant in particular, have come to symbolize the misery inflicted by the war. The Russians have pulverized most of the city in a two-month siege that has trapped civilians with little food, water, medicine or heat.</p> <p>The city's fall would deprive Ukraine of a vital port, allow Russia to establish a land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014, and free up troops to fight elsewhere in the Donbas.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 'Significant damage' Oklahoma tornado
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/significant-damage-oklahoma-severe-weather-reported-tornado/story?id=84510122
GIST	<p>Severe weather caused "significant damage" and wide-spread power outages in Oklahoma Wednesday, officials said.</p> <p>Seminole got hit especially hard after a reported tornado touched down in the city, located about 65 miles east of Oklahoma City.</p> <p>The Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security reported late Wednesday that there was "significant damage" to structures, including businesses, in Seminole, and that the Red Cross was setting up a shelter for displaced residents there.</p> <p>The National Weather Service of Norman, Oklahoma, had warned residents of a "damaging tornado" on the ground near Seminole County earlier Wednesday.</p> <p>Aerial footage from Oklahoma City ABC affiliate KOCO showed widespread damage to structures in Seminole after the storm.</p> <p>The extent of any casualties is unclear.</p> <p>The City of Seminole warned residents about multiple downed power lines during the severe storm system.</p> <p>Oklahoma Highway Patrol said it responded to Seminole in the wake of the storm damage, including protecting drivers from the downed power lines.</p> <p>There are some 12,400 power outages reported throughout the state, while storms and flooding are forecast to continue overnight, the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security said.</p> <p>A tornado watch remains in effect across much of Oklahoma and West-Central Texas Wednesday overnight.</p> <p>There have already been at least seven reported tornadoes in Texas and Oklahoma -- including Crowell, Texas, and Maud, Oklahoma.</p>

	The National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center had said there was the potential for "significant" - EF2 or higher -- tornadoes in parts of Oklahoma and Texas on Wednesday.
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	05/04 CISA: threat of 'cascading attacks' Russia
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/cisa-director-warns-of-threat-of-cascading-attacks-from-russia-like-notpetya-as-the-war-drag-on/
GIST	<p>Despite “evolving intelligence about potential plans” that prompted the Department of Homeland Security to warn public- and private-sector entities to put their “shields up” to guard against malicious cyber activity, Russia has not been seen inflicting “specific attacks” on U.S. targets to date during the course of its war on Ukraine, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Director Jen Easterly told the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security at a Thursday hearing to discuss CISA’s FY2023 budget request.</p> <p>But Easterly stressed that CISA is “very concerned that as the war drags on, that there may, in fact, be retaliatory attacks given the very severe sanctions that we have imposed on the Kremlin.”</p> <p>“There may be ransomware attacks or there may be cascading attacks as we saw with the destructive malware NotPetya in 2017,” she said.</p> <p>The director told lawmakers that \$2.5 billion requested for CISA by the Biden administration “represents a marked increase, nearly 18 percent more than last year’s request.”</p> <p>“And it really recognizes our growing role in the security and resilience of our nation, the confidence in our ability to execute, and the intent to ensure that we have the tools necessary to keep our communities safe and secure,” she added.</p> <p>Easterly stressed that “to effectively execute our role as the operational lead for federal civilian cybersecurity, the protection of the .gov, we have to advance our ability to actively detect threats targeting federal networks and gain granular visibility into the cybersecurity of federal infrastructure.”</p> <p>“The budget provides federal cybersecurity funding, an increase — a total of \$1.5 billion for CISA cybersecurity programs and activities that enable CISA and our federal partners to detect, analyze, mitigate, and respond to cybersecurity threats,” she said. “Within this amount, the budget includes \$71 million for the [Joint Cyber Defense Collaborative] to ensure that we can continue cyber operational planning and partner engagement that are so critical to our nation’s collective cyber defense. The budget also includes \$407 million for NCPS, \$425 million for continuous mitigation and diagnostics, very important for that federal cybersecurity, to provide that technological foundation to really secure and defend federal civilian executive branch networks.” In addition, \$174 million would “annualize what we got with the American Rescue Plan Act, incredibly important to continue, again, in protecting the .gov.”</p> <p>“The budget also makes critical investments in mission-enabling. As we grow as an agency and being the newest federal agency in the U.S. government, we have to grow commensurately in the engine that drives mission,” Easterly continued. “So, procurement, facilities, human capital, our budgeting, it’s incredibly important to the success of everything we’re trying to do to include the execution of our budget. To support our operational capabilities, we’ve also asked for \$175 million in infrastructure protection; \$187 million for our growing field force that I’m incredibly excited about, working on the front lines with many of your constituents; \$170 million for our emergency communications mission.”</p> <p>“It also fully funds our risk management activities to include \$115 million for our National Risk Management Center that deals with things like securing our supply chains, incredibly important. Finally, at</p>

the heart of our mission is partnership and collaboration. And that's why \$72 million for our stakeholder engagement activities, fostering collaboration and coordination, and, really, that culture of shared responsibility that is so important and foundational to our collective defense of the nation."

Days before Russia invaded Ukraine in February, CISA advised that "all organizations — regardless of size — adopt a heightened posture when it comes to cybersecurity and protecting their most critical assets" as the U.S. government was "mindful of the potential for the Russian government to consider escalating its destabilizing actions in ways that may impact others outside of Ukraine."

Asked about the state of that cyber threat, Easterly told lawmakers that "malicious cyber activity is part of the Russian playbook."

"And as we heard from the president, we know of evolving intelligence that the Russians are planning for potential attacks on our nation. And so, we have actually, for the past five-plus months, been working with our partners across the federal government, across private industry, and with our state and local partners to enable us to share threat information at declassified and unclassified levels with our Intelligence Community partners and all of the mitigation guidance that partners need to follow to ensure that they can drive down risk to their networks," she said.

The director predicted "we could see three things... the threat that we see going on pretty aggressively, Russian cyberattacks against Ukraine. They could cascade out of the region and have an impact on the U.S. We saw that in NotPetya in 2017, a destructive malware that cascaded out of Ukraine, affected multinationals."

"We could see Russian-aligned cybercriminals launch ransomware attacks, as we saw last summer in the Colonial Pipeline and JBS Foods," Easterly continued. "Or we could see a deliberate attack by Russian state-sponsored actors against our critical infrastructure. And that's why we've been working to ensure that everybody has their shields up and working collaboratively with our Joint Cyber Defense Collaborative, specifically with the technology companies, with the financial companies, with the energy companies, to ensure they have all the guidance they need to protect themselves."

Easterly emphasized throughout the hearing the need for smaller public- and private-sector entities with small security staffing or budget to be able to have the capability to defend against cyberattacks.

"I think as we grow as America's cyber defense agency, as we see a very complex threat environment that continues to get more complex and threat actors that continue to get more sophisticated and are very well-resourced, we look forward to working with this committee to make sure that we do have the capacity and the capability to be able to defend federal networks and to work with our critical infrastructure partners, some of which that are very target-rich but resource-poor," she said. "Think of the small hospitals, the small schools, the water utilities. We need to be able to continually provide them no-cost services, tools, and assessments to ensure that they can raise that cybersecurity baseline. That's why the grant programs are so important."

The SolarWinds hack first reported by FireEye in 2020 "was really a wake-up call... that taught us a couple of key things," Easterly told lawmakers.

"One, it taught us that we do not have the requisite visibility into the federal civilian executive branch networks to be able to effectively protect and defend them," she said. "So, all of the improvements that we've looked to make over the past nine months to increase that visibility, to improve our architecture, to modernize, to be able to put in place Zero Trust, to really build more than just a network perimeter security mechanism is so important to really getting after that visibility issue."

"And we have spent a lot of time doing that and some of our budget request speaks to those types of capabilities."

Easterly highlighted how the partnerships CISA is forging with the private sector “who oftentimes are going to detect that malicious activity before we do are so absolutely critical in forging that collective defense.”

“And so, as we build more detected capabilities, as we continue to mature our continuous diagnostics and mitigation program, as we instantiate Zero Trust and secure cloud and multifactor authentication and endpoint detection and response, making sure that we’re also bringing together the private sector and the public sector,” she added. “To really build that common picture of the threat environment, I think, is going to be critical to solving this really challenging and complex problem.”

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HEADLINE	05/04 Cyber Command ‘hunt forward’ operations
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/nakasone-persistent-engagement-hunt-forward-nine-teams-ukraine/
GIST	<p>National Security Agency Director and U.S. Cyber Command Gen. Paul Nakasone said Tuesday that Cyber Command conducted nine “hunt forward” operations in different countries last year, a data point he shared to illustrate why the command’s use of persistent engagement is critical to its success.</p> <p>“These are countries that have asked for our assistance, deploying our defensive teams for being able to identify malware and tradecraft our adversaries were using and then sharing that broadly with a commercial provider,” Nakasone said in prepared remarks delivered at Vanderbilt University.</p> <p>U.S. Cyber Command’s use of persistent engagement — defined as the need to constantly interact with adversaries in cyberspace and the importance of speed and agility to success — and what Nakasone calls a “defend forward” strategy has been a topic of discussion recently amid reports that the Biden administration had planned to pare back cyber authorities given to the Department of Defense under National Security Presidential Memorandum-13 (NSPM-13).</p> <p>Nakasone told the Vanderbilt audience the American approach to the conflict in Ukraine has been informed by a philosophy of “continual action,” which was articulated in the 2018 Department of Defense strategy that NSPM-13 enabled.</p> <p>The nine hunt-forward operations conducted last year are an example of the persistent engagement model of cyber operations which grew out of the 2018 DOD strategy, Nakasone said.</p> <p>Cyber National Mission Force Commander Maj. Gen. William Hartman said in a March speech that the command had deployed defense-oriented, hunt-forward cyber protection forces to foreign nations seeking support in strengthening their cyber defenses 27 times in the last four years.</p> <p>Russia and Ukraine</p> <p>Nakasone also spoke about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, saying those who are scoffing at the relative lack of Russian cyber aggression outside of Ukraine are speaking too soon.</p> <p>“We don’t necessarily believe that by any means this is done and so we have, obviously, a completely vigilant approach to what’s going on,” Nakasone said in an on-stage interview after his speech.</p> <p>Nakasone said that in the past couple of weeks he has gleaned more intelligence on what’s happened in Ukraine, and that the cyberattacks there have been severe.</p> <p>“This idea that nothing has happened is not right,” Nakasone said. “There have been destructive attacks, a series of infrastructure attacks [where] satellite communications have been targeted.”</p> <p>He said a Cyber National Mission Force hunt-forward team traveled to Ukraine in December to help build resilience against cyberattacks.</p> <p>National Security Agency Director of Cybersecurity Rob Joyce, speaking at the same Vanderbilt event, agreed with Nakasone, saying “there was some really, extra-unethical cyber pressure brought to</p>

Ukrainian internet networks by Russia. You know, don't be dismissive that just because that didn't come directly at the U.S. as much as it did Ukraine that we didn't have a major event."

[Mandiant CEO Kevin Mandia](#) appeared at the Vanderbilt conference as well, and said in an interview with CyberScoop that he believes "there was a decision made somewhere in Russia to not escalate outside of the immediate theater of Ukraine with cyber. And because of that, nobody knows what will trigger an escalation, or what the escalation will be."

Mandia said he worries about a "pretty broad zone of potential outcomes to that."

He dismissed the possibility that Russian cyberattacks against the West have been muted because the Russians aren't as skilled as their reputation suggests.

"Speaking as a victim of a [SolarWinds breach](#) the one domain I know they're good at is the cyber domain — maybe their tanks aren't doing really well," Mandia said. "We're not seeing their most skilled intruders doing anything out of the ordinary right now. I hate saying that, because somewhere, those guys will be like, 'Oh, they're not seeing us right now. We are seeing them.'"

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HEADLINE	05/04 China-link APT pilfered treasure trove of IP
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/china-linked-apt-caught-pilfering-treasure-trove-of-ip/179503/
GIST	<p>A state-sponsored threat actor designed a house-of-cards style infection chain to exfiltrate massive troves of highly sensitive data.</p> <p>Researchers from Cybereason's Nocturnus Team have uncovered a massive, highly successful, three-year-long campaign of intellectual property theft.</p> <p>The perpetrators were likely able to siphon hundreds of gigabytes worth of "sensitive proprietary information from technology and manufacturing companies mainly in East Asia, Western Europe, and North America," according to the report released Wednesday.</p> <p>The theft remained completely under the radar from law enforcement. They pulled it off by combining an "arsenal" of malware – including a brand new strain called DEPLOYLOG – into a complex infection chain.</p> <p>The researchers attributed the campaign, with "moderate-to-high confidence," to the Winnti group (aka APT 41, BARIUM, or Blackfly). Winnti is "an exceptionally capable adversary" that is "believed to be operating on behalf of Chinese state interests and specializes in cyberespionage and intellectual property theft."</p> <p>A Highly Successful Heist</p> <p>Researchers believe the campaign has been ongoing, traced back to 2019.</p> <p>They said the Winnti began their attacks by exploiting a popular enterprise resource planning (ERP) platform used by their targets. With this foothold they installed web shells – to establish persistence – then began their reconnaissance and credential theft. With a map of the network and privileged credentials, they could move laterally to access sensitive stores of data. All of these are common strategies used by APTs around the world every day.</p> <p>What distinguished Winnti's attacks was in the details.</p> <p>For one thing, they leveraged multiple vulnerabilities in that undisclosed ERP platform. Some of the vulnerabilities were publicly known, but some were zero-days.</p> <p>The infection chain they crafted from there is of particular note. The researchers called it a "house of cards" – "a sophisticated and unique multi-staged infection chain with numerous payloads. Each payload</p>

fulfills a unique role in the infection chain, which is successful only upon the complete deployment of all of the payloads.”

As an example, one of these cards is DEPLOYLOG: a previously undocumented malware strain. First it’s introduced to the host machine by another module, PRIVATELOG. Then, in turn, it drops a rootkit – WINNKIT – and opens up a line of communication between the rootkit and Winnti’s command and control servers.

WINNKIT, ultimately, is what’s most important here. “A driver acting as a rootkit,” it contains a host of useful tools for transferring data from a host machine, modifying files, killing processes and much more. And despite being known to cyber analysts, the researchers noted, it possesses a near-zero detection rate in VirusTotal.

As we can see, each stage of this chain was sophisticated in and of itself. But it was their house of cards-style arrangement that made this campaign “almost impossible to analyze unless all pieces of the puzzle are assembled in the correct order.”

Stolen Data Costly and Dangerous

Winnti primarily went after American, European, and Asian technology companies and manufacturers. They went for intellectual property “including sensitive documents, blueprints, diagrams, formulas, and manufacturing-related proprietary data,” according to the report.

It’s clear that the haul was massive, and it’s partly for that reason that the researchers couldn’t determine the exact number of organizations affected, and the precise financial impact incurred by them.

The other reason why they couldn’t gauge the combined cost is that many costs may be yet to come. Beyond commercial IP, “the attackers collected information that could be used for future cyberattacks, such as details about the target company’s business units, network architecture, user accounts and credentials, employee emails and customer data.”

To avoid further Winnti attacks in years to come, targeted organizations will need to update all those employee credentials, adjust that architecture, and root out any potential backdoors. If even one hole is left over, they’ll remain vulnerable.

Aging APT Still Packs a Punch

Winnti is one of the oldest APTs still in business, with malicious campaigns dating back a dozen years already.

In their early years they primarily targeted [gaming companies](#) in Southeast Asia, stealing in-game currencies and then flipping them for real life profits.

Notorious for their “stealth, sophistication, and focus on stealing technology secrets,” the APT has been known to compromise digital certificates – the electronic documents meant to ensure authenticity between connected devices – and deploy bootkits – which nuzzle into the innermost parts of a computer’s motherboard: the master boot record – to poison [supply chains](#) and even target specific individuals.

These were already advanced tactics, but their newest campaign is the groups most sophisticated to date.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Account takeover via voice channels on rise
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cybercrime/financial-fraud-account-takeover-via-voice-channels-on-the-rise
GIST	Cybersecurity concerns are all-too-often focused on digital platforms: online, mobile and even wearable devices. However, old-fashioned voice connections to financial institutions are increasingly being used by bad actors for nefarious gain, according to a recent report from Pindrop .

Indeed, while so much attention is focused on digital access and the potential fraud there, some cybersecurity analysts are looking at how bad actors have been abusing long-standing voice access to financial institutions, through call centers and automated voice trees. Atlanta-based voice technology provider Pindrop recently released its annual [Voice Intelligence & Security Report](#), aimed at uncovering fraud, dark-web threats and other fraud challenges that could impact voice-based security.

Since individuals and their financial service providers may not consider [voice channels and providers](#) in their security plans, fraudsters are increasingly making their attacks here, since they see an unprotected opportunity. Indeed, the Pindrop study found that 92% of fraudsters were able to pass knowledge-based authentication (KBA) questions based in security authentication tests, while genuine customers only passed these knowledge-based tests 46% of the time.

Hence the findings of this most recent Pindrop report point to a “security weakness when used as an authentication method, as well as the impact on genuine customers who will often fail to pass authentication with this security system,” according to the release.

The Pindrop study also found:

- 42% of customers are satisfied with the identification process required to access accounts via phone with 52% feeling satisfied with online access
- Fraudsters passed knowledge-based authentication (KBA) 92% of the time, while genuine customers only passed KBAs 46% of the time
- A cloned Mastercard with PIN costs \$15 on the dark web
- A cloned American Express card with PIN is \$35
- Credit card details for an account balance up to \$5,000 is \$20
- Online banking logins with a minimum of \$100 is \$35

“With 2021 seeing a 68 percent increase in data breaches, bad actors are compromising data easier and more efficiently,” said Vijay Balasubramaniyan, CEO and cofounder of Pindrop, in a prepared release. “Now is a good time to change the locks and advance the way customers can open more worlds safely and privately with just their voice.”

The report pointed out that organized cybercrime groups are setting up “storefronts” on the dark web, where they sell data that they often cull from voice-based fraud and accessing legitimate accounts. The situation has gotten so bad that customer satisfaction with identification online is actually better than with voice calls, which is a far more long-established delivery channel, according to Pindrop.

Roughly two-thirds (65%) of corporate board members expect that customer engagement and loyalty will improve if companies (including financial institutions) increase their investment in technology and digital business capabilities, per the Pindrop study.

The report examines how authentication and identification technology that “allow people the right access have a dual nature. While the systems are designed to let users in, these programs also have the ability to let in individuals who are not the user,” per the release on the Pindrop study. “To stay protected and secure, it is crucial to understand how bad actors rely on certain authentication methods to commit fraud.”

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HEADLINE	05/04 Windows event logs for malware stashing
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/kaspersky-warns-fileless-malware-hidden-windows-event-logs
GIST	<p>Threat hunters at Kaspersky are publicly documenting a malicious campaign that abuses Windows event logs to store fileless last stage Trojans and keep them hidden in the file system.</p> <p>In a research report published Wednesday, Kaspersky said the first phase of the campaign started around September 2021, with the threat actor luring victims into downloading a digitally-signed Cobalt Strike module.</p>

The use of event logs for malware stashing is a technique that Kaspersky's security researchers say they have not seen before in live malware attacks.

The researchers haven't attributed the attacks to a known threat actor, but say that the group stands out because it patches Windows native API functions associated with event tracking and the anti-malware scan interface to ensure the infection remains stealthy.

In fact, the attackers are clearly invested in avoiding detection: they use domains with names that mimic legitimate ones, use virtual private servers for hosting, and employ a variety of anti-detection decryptors – observed compilers range from Microsoft's cl.exe to a recent version of Go.

According to Kaspersky, the attackers also sign some of the malicious files with digital certificates that appear to be issued by the threat actor themselves. In terms of tooling, the group was seen employing Cobalt Strike, NetSPI (part of SilentBreak's framework), various custom modules, and additional third-party code.

The threat actor's anti-detection portfolio includes MSVC, GCC under MinGW, and Go compiler 1.17.2; whitelisted launchers, digital certificates, Go droppers to patch logging-related API functions, and the storing of the last stage malware in the binary part of event logs, broken down in 8 KB blocks.

Furthermore, Kaspersky discovered that the function names in the main package have been obfuscated.

The last stage Trojans communicate with the command and control (C&C) server either using HTTP with RC4 encryption, or by employing unencrypted communication with named pipes.

"The latter way is technically able to communicate with any network visible external host, but under Windows named pipes are built upon the SMB protocol, which would barely open for external networks. So these modules most probably serve for lateral movement," Kaspersky says.

Upon execution, the HTTP Trojan fingerprints the infected system and sends the data to the server if an initial ping to the server is successful.

The malware supports commands to fingerprint the system, execute received commands, download and save payloads, list processes, inject code into target processes, sleep for a specified period of time, and terminate the session with the C&C.

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HEADLINE	05/04 EU grants Europol new data powers
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/eu-hands-police-agency-new-powers-over-personal-data
GIST	<p>The European Parliament on Wednesday voted to hand the EU's police agency new powers to gather and use data, provoking an angry response from privacy activists.</p> <p>The chamber overwhelmingly approved a proposal that allows Europol to work more closely with non-EU governments and share personal information with private companies.</p> <p>The European Union said the new regime was needed to help coordinate the fight against terrorism, child sex abuse and other serious crimes.</p> <p>But activists warned that oversight was too weak and the reforms would turn the police agency into a "data black hole".</p> <p>"Europol will be allowed to collect and share data left, right, and centre without much restriction or control," said Chloe Berthelemy of the NGO European Digital Rights.</p>

	<p>The group, along with a coalition of other NGOs, said the reforms created serious risks of violations of the right to a fair trial, privacy and data protection, non-discrimination and freedom of expression.</p> <p>The European Commission had argued the new powers were needed because terrorists often used private companies to recruit, and insisted the reforms would respect fundamental rights.</p> <p>A European Parliament statement stressed that people would be able "to consult personal data related to them" and oversight would come from a new post of Fundamental Rights Officer and the European Data Protection Supervisor.</p> <p>The regulation was "a substantial leap forward in the capabilities of the agency", said rapporteur Javier Zarzalejos following the vote, which was carried with 480 MEPs in favour and 143 against.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Idaho needs to shore up cybersecurity
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/idaho-needs-shore-cybersecurity-task-force-says
GIST	<p>Idaho needs to be better prepared to defend against inevitable cyberattacks that could harm individuals, businesses and critical infrastructure, the Governor's Cybersecurity Task Force said in a report released Wednesday.</p> <p>The 34-page report contains 18 major recommendations that include providing active cyber deterrence, increasing spending on cybersecurity, ensuring election integrity and increasing the public's awareness of cybersecurity threats.</p> <p>"Across our state and throughout the nation, there have been few more pressing threats than the threat to safety, security and freedom of cyberattacks," said Republican Gov. Brad Little at a Cyber Security Task Force news conference announcing the report at the Idaho National Laboratory Meeting Center in Idaho Falls.</p> <p>"This is not a one-and-done," Little said. "We're going to implement the baselines from this, but then we're going to have to continue with these recommendations."</p> <p>Among the task force's recommendations is developing a statewide strategy that provides a clear set of actions to improve the state's cybersecurity.</p> <p>It also recommends that Little establish and the Legislature fund an Idaho Cyber Fusion Center that could be a central resource for identifying cybersecurity threats, warning of them and coordinating responses to them.</p> <p>The task force also suggests creating a cyber response defense fund in case of a cyberattack involving elections.</p> <p>That has already been taken care of with \$12 million approved by lawmakers earlier this year. Another \$500,000 was approved for "proactive integrity audits" to enhance election transparency and confidence in election results.</p> <p>Little formed the task force in August 2021 to deal with the heightened risk the state faces from cyberattacks as Idaho becomes increasingly connected with the world and more devices are connected to the internet.</p> <p>The task force has 19 members representing key Idaho institutions, including the Idaho National Laboratory, the Idaho Department of Commerce, Idaho Office of Emergency Management, Idaho Power, Micron Technology, Bank of Idaho, Boise State University, University of Idaho, Idaho State University and several Idaho state lawmakers.</p>

	<p>“The more digital connections people make and data they exchange, the more opportunities adversaries have to destroy private lives, disrupt critical infrastructure, and damage our economic and democratic institutions,” the task force’s report states.</p> <p>The report lists five strategic objectives. Those are safeguarding Idaho’s infrastructure, increasing investments to bolster the cybersecurity workforce, ensuring election integrity, educating the public about cybersecurity awareness and keeping track of the changing global cybersecurity landscape.</p> <p>The report notes Russia’s attack on Ukraine, that has included cyberattacks by Russia, and the potential for “cyber spillover.”</p> <p>“The White House has repeatedly warned that Russia’s invasion, coupled with international sanctions, could lead the Kremlin to use cyberattacks against private sector organizations, including critical infrastructure owners and operators,” the report said. “Like all states, Idaho would not be immune to the consequences of such an event.”</p> <p>Zach Tudor, associate laboratory director at the Idaho National Laboratory, co-chaired the task force.</p> <p>“I believe the recommendations we developed lay the groundwork for improving Idaho’s cybersecurity stance both now and into the future,” he said at the news conference. “The timing of the report couldn’t be more important. Right now, there are billions of devices ranging from computers to smartphones, vehicles to vacuums, all connected online. And much of this technology isn’t properly secured. That means these systems and the people who rely on them are at risk.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 HHS info security program ‘not effective’
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/hhs-information-security-program/
GIST	<p>The information security program of the United States’ Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has been deemed ineffective for a fourth consecutive year.</p> <p>Audits conducted for the HHS’ Office of Inspector General (OIG) to assess compliance with the Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014 (FISMA) in the fiscal years 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 have all resulted in the program receiving a ‘not effective’ rating.</p> <p>The results of the most recent audit, published in April 2022, were conducted at five of the HHS’ 12 operating divisions, although the OIG did not specify which five divisions were audited.</p> <p>Explaining why the program had once again been rated ‘not effective,’ the OIG report stated: “This determination was made based on HHS not meeting the ‘Managed and Measurable’ maturity level for the Identify, Protect, Detect, Respond, and Recover function areas as required by DHS guidance and the FY 2021 Inspector General FISMA Reporting Metrics.”</p> <p>Despite the department’s failure to meet the required rating level for five of the five function areas, the OIG acknowledged that the department was aware of ways in which it could improve its cybersecurity and that efforts were being made by the department towards achieving a mature cybersecurity posture.</p> <p>“HHS continues to implement changes to strengthen the maturity of its enterprise-wide cybersecurity program. Progress continues to be made to sustain cybersecurity maturity across all FISMA domains,” note the OIG,</p> <p>“HHS is aware of opportunities to strengthen the Department’s overall information security program which would help ensure that all OpDivs are consistently implementing and in line with the requirements across their security programs.”</p>

	<p>The OIG found that in the fiscal year 2021, the HHS had failed to fully implement a continuous diagnostics and mitigation (CDM) strategy and that the department had no definitive schedule to realize the CDM program across all its operational divisions (OpDivs).</p> <p>“Without a fully implemented CDM program, HHS may not be able to identify cybersecurity risks on an ongoing basis, use CDM information to prioritize the risks based on potential impacts, and then mitigate the most significant vulnerabilities first,” warned the OIG.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/05 NHS inboxes hijacked for malicious emails
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/nhs-inboxes-hijacked-send-1000/
GIST	<p>More than 1000 phishing emails were sent from compromised National Health Service (NHS) inboxes over a six-month period ending this year, according to new research from Inky.</p> <p>The email security firm claimed the campaign started around October 2021 and escalated “dramatically” in March this year, when Inky detected 1157 phishing emails originating from NHSmail inboxes.</p> <p>After reporting its findings to the NHS on April 13, the volume of attacks originating from NHSmail inboxes fell dramatically the next day to just a “few,” the firm claimed.</p> <p>Some 139 health service employees had their official email accounts individually compromised in the campaign to send out a variety of malicious messages.</p> <p>“The majority were fake new document notifications with malicious links to credential harvesting sites that targeted Microsoft credentials. All emails also had the NHS email footer at the bottom,” Inky explained.</p> <p>“Some emails impersonated Adobe and Microsoft by using their logos in phishing emails, and a few were advance-fee scams.”</p> <p>However, the scale of the campaign could have been even greater, given that Inky only detected the phishing messages sent to its customers.</p> <p>In response to Inky’s findings, an official NHS statement claimed that the health service has processes in place to continuously monitor for such risks.</p> <p>“We address them in collaboration with our partners who support and deliver the national NHSmail service,” it added.</p> <p>“NHS organizations running their own email systems will have similar processes and protections in place to identify and coordinate their responses, and call upon NHS Digital assistance if required.”</p> <p>It’s unclear how the healthcare employees were compromised in the first place, although recent research from Comparitech estimated that UK public sector workers might have clicked on as many as 58,000 suspicious links last year.</p> <p>When assessed per employee, NHS Digital recorded the highest number of malicious emails for 2021 at 89,353.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/05 SKorea joins NATO cyber defense center
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/south-korea-admitted-to-nato-cyber/
GIST	<p>South Korea has become the first Asian nation to join NATO’s Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE), in a move that will likely further stoke tensions with Moscow.</p>

The country's National Intelligence Service (NIS) made the announcement today, according to the local Yonhap News Agency.

Going forward, it will represent South Korea in the center's training and research activities, according to the brief report.

"We plan to strengthen our cyber response capabilities to a world-class level by increasing the number of our staff sent to the center and expanding the scope of joint training," the NIS is reported to have said.

The latest entrant to the CCDCOE brings the total number of members to 32, including 27 full NATO members.

The center was initially set up in 2008 following a series of crippling cyber-attacks in Estonia traced back to the Kremlin. It serves as a knowledge hub, research institution and training facility focused on interdisciplinary applied research, consulting and exercises in cybersecurity.

Over the years, it has become an important part of the NATO effort to combat disinformation and malicious cyber-activity from the East.

The move by South Korea will be met with anger in Moscow following a vote by the CCDCOE in March to admit Ukraine as a "contributing participant" alongside other non-NATO countries such as Sweden, Finland, Switzerland and now South Korea.

"Ukraine, in fact being a testing ground for the use of cyber-tools for malicious purposes, has the unique practical experience in neutralizing cyber-attacks that may be useful to partner countries. We continue to build national cybersecurity capacity, strengthen and enhance our legislation," said Ukrainian ambassador Mariana Betsa on a visit to the Tallin-based center last month.

"We strongly advocate the bringing to justice of those who intentionally organize and carry out cyber-attacks. We believe that existing international law applies in cyberspace. We reiterate that the principle of prohibiting one state from attacking others applies here as it does elsewhere."

Also, last month, another non-NATO member, Finland, won the center's Locked Shields 2022 cyber defense exercise.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Leak: emails Australia offshore detention
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/anonymous-leak-police-emails-australia-offshore-detention/
GIST	<p>On Monday, May 2nd, 2022, the Anonymous collective released 82GB worth of emails apparently belonging to the Nauru Police Force. According to Anonymous, the data leak was in protest against the alleged ill-treatment of asylum seekers and refugees carried out by Island authorities on behalf of the Australian government.</p> <p>For your information, Nauru is a tiny island country in Micronesia, northeast of Australia infamously known for being used by Australia as an offshore refugee detention center in return for aid.</p> <p>As seen by Hackread.com, the total number of leaked emails is 285,635 and available for direct and torrent download through the official website of "Enlace Hacktivist," a platform that aims to "Document hacker history."</p> <p>Although Hackread.com could not analyze the trove of emails, in a statement, Anonymous explained that the leaked confidential emails contain details related to abuses that the Nauru Police Force and the Australian government tried to cover up.</p>

The statement also demands an end to the policy of mandatory immigration detention and the permanent closing of immigration detention facilities, including on the island of Nauru.

Anonymous also urged authorities to launch an investigation of all allegations of abuse in the immigration detention centers and pay lifetime reparations to victims.

So we decided to hack the Nauru Police Force, who were tasked by the Australian government with policing the island and obtained 285,635 confidential emails related to abuses that they tried to cover up, and we are making them all public.

The Republic of Nauru has previously disputed reports of torture, sexual assault and child abuse on the island. Can they still dispute this when all their emails are out in the open?

The things we saw and read made us sick. We are asking the newly elected Australian government to by the end of 2022:

~ End the policy of mandatory immigration detention and permanently close immigration detention facilities, including on the island Nauru.

~ Grant permanent residence to all asylum seekers, including the 124 people forcibly moved out from Manus Island.

~ Investigate all allegations of abuse in the immigration detention centres and pay lifetime reparations to victims.

Anonymous!

On Twitter, Emma Best, journalist, and co-founder of a non-profit whistleblower organization DDoSecrets Distributed Denial of Secrets, aka DDoSecrets, [confirmed](#) the leak. Best also announced that the enormous data dump is also available on DDoSecrets.

On the other hand, @YourAnonNews, one of the largest social media representatives of Anonymous also [tweeted](#) about the data leak stating that “Anonymous hackers release 1/4 million Nauru Island Immigration Detention Center Police emails documenting abuses suffered by asylum seekers and refugees under successive Scott Morrison (Prime Minister of Australia since 24 August 2018) portfolios.”

@AnonOpsSE, another prominent representative of the Anonymous collective [tweeted](#) that “Enlace Hacktivist has released 285,635 emails (82 GB) from the Nauru Police Force, documenting conditions of the island and abuses endured by asylum-seekers and refugees.”

At the time of publishing this article, there was no comment from the Nauru Police Force or Australian authorities.

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HEADLINE	05/04 FBI: BEC is \$43B scam
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-says-business-email-compromise-is-a-43-billion-scam/
GIST	<p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) said today that the amount of money lost to business email compromise (BEC) scams continues to grow each year, with a 65% increase in the identified global exposed losses between July 2019 and December 2021.</p> <p>From June 2016 until July 2019, IC3 received victim complaints regarding 241,206 domestic and international incidents, with a total exposed dollar loss of \$43,312,749,946.</p>

"Based on the financial data reported to the IC3 for 2021, banks located in Thailand and Hong Kong were the primary international destinations of fraudulent funds," the FBI said.

"China, which ranked in the top two destinations in previous years, ranked third in 2021 followed by Mexico and Singapore."

This was revealed in a new public service announcement published on the Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) site as an update to a previous PSA from September 2019, when the FBI said losses to BEC attacks reported by victims between June 2016 and July 2019 [reached a total of over \\$26 billion](#).

According to the IC3 2021 Internet Crime Report [\[PDF\]](#), BEC scams were the cybercrime type with the highest reported total victim losses last year.

Victims reported losses of almost \$2.4 billion in 2021, based on 19,954 recorded complaints linked to BEC attacks targeting individuals and businesses.

BEC scam?

[BEC](#) scammers are employing various tactics — including social engineering, phishing, and hacking — to compromise business email accounts which will get used to redirect payments to attacker-controlled bank accounts.

In this type of scam (also known as EAC or Email Account Compromise), the crooks will commonly target small, medium, and large businesses. Still, they're also attacking individuals if the payout is worth it.

Their success rate is also very high, given that they generally impersonate someone who has the target's trust, such as business partners or company executives.

However, "the scam is not always associated with a transfer-of-funds request," as the FBI explained in the PSA alert.

"One variation involves compromising legitimate business email accounts and requesting employees' Personally Identifiable Information, Wage and Tax Statement (W-2) forms, or even crypto currency wallets."

BEC defense guidance

The FBI also [provided guidance](#) on how to defend against BEC scam attempts:

- Use secondary channels or two-factor authentication to verify requests for changes in account information.
- Ensure the URL in emails is associated with the business/individual it claims to be from.
- Be alert to hyperlinks that may contain misspellings of the actual domain name.
- Refrain from supplying login credentials or PII of any sort via email. Be aware that many emails requesting your personal information may appear to be legitimate.
- Verify the email address used to send emails, especially when using a mobile or handheld device, by ensuring the sender's address appears to match who it is coming from.
- Ensure the settings in employees' computers are enabled to allow full email extensions to be viewed.
- Monitor your personal financial accounts on a regular basis for irregularities, such as missing deposits.

The federal law enforcement agency advises those who fall victim to BEC fraud to immediately reach out to their bank to request a recall of funds.

They're also urged to file a complaint with the FBI at [BEC.ic3.gov](#), regardless of the lost amount, and as soon as possible.

HEADLINE	05/04 NFT job offers pushing malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/pixiv-deviantart-artists-hit-by-nft-job-offers-pushing-malware/
GIST	<p>Users on Pixiv, DeviantArt, and other creator-oriented online platforms report receiving multiple messages from people claiming to be from the "Cyberpunk Ape Executives" NFT project, with the main goal to infect artists' devices with information-stealing malware.</p> <p>"Cyberpunk Ape Executives" is a limited collection of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) following the closed-club approach that has given similar ventures astronomical fame and value.</p> <p>As reported by Malwarebytes, threat actors are targeting artists with offers to work with the people behind the project and design a new set of characters to expand the collection with new NFTs, offering compensation of up to \$350 per day.</p> <p>The message sent to the artists is given below:</p> <p><i>"Hi! We appreciate your artwork! Cyberpunk Ape Executives is inviting 2D-artists (online / freelance) to collaborate in creating NFT project. As a 2D-artist you will create amazing and adorable NFT characters. Your characters will become an important part of our NFT universe! Our expectations from the candidate: 1) Experience as a 2D-artist 2) Experience and examples of creating characters 3) Photoshop skills."</i></p> <p><i>"Main tasks: 1) Creating characters in our NFT style 2) Interaction with Art Team Lead on task setting, feedback. For further communication check out the examples of our NFT works: [url removed] and send a reply (CV + examples of your works) for this position. Approximate payment per day = \$200-\$350. We make payments to Paypal, BTC, ETH, LTC."</i></p> <p>Cyberpunk ape malware</p> <p>The messages sent to the artists contain a link that, if clicked, leads to a MEGA download page from where the victim can download a password-protected 4.1 MB RAR archive named 'Cyberpunk Ape Exemples (pass 111).rar' that contains samples of Cyberpunk Ape Executives artwork.</p> <p>This is supposed to help the artists understand the style they should follow and create a false sense of legitimacy to the job offer.</p> <p>Inside the archive, the artists will find GIFs of Cyberpunk Ape Executives NFTs, and among them, an executable file made to look like another GIF image, easily blending in with the rest of the collection.</p> <p>This executable is a malware installer that will infect the device with an information-stealing trojan with a good chance of bypassing AV detection based on current VirusTotal detections.</p> <p>Info-stealers typically target information stored on web browsers, such as account passwords, cryptocurrency wallets, credit cards, or even files on the disk.</p> <p>When the threat actors get their hands on the account credentials of a notable account with a high number of followers, they use that to promote the same scam to even more users.</p> <p>This could be even more dangerous for artists who work with NFTs, as stealing victims' wallets will allow the threat actors to steal any cryptocurrency or NFTs stored within them.</p> <p>Many creators report that bot accounts kept sending these messages every few minutes, while other artists say they received the message in Japanese.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Australia transport agency hit by attack
SOURCE	https://www.itpro.co.uk/security/cyber-attacks/367572/australian-state-transport-agency-hit-by-cyber-attack

GIST	<p>The Australian state of New South Wales's (NSW) transport agency, Transport for NSW, revealed today that it had been impacted by a cyber attack in early April 2022.</p> <p>The attack focused on the agency's Authorised Inspection Scheme (AIS) online application system. This is a system that authorises examiners to inspect vehicles to meet safety requirements. To do this, users must input personal details like their name, phone number, email address, driver's licence number, and date of birth.</p> <p>During the incident, an unauthorised third party successfully accessed a small number of the application's user accounts, stated Transport for NSW. It's notifying affected examiners individually and providing options to help them avoid further impacts from the incident.</p> <p>Additional security measures were put in place and monitoring of the application is continuing, although Transport for NSW didn't reveal what new measures were introduced.</p> <p>"We recognise that data privacy is paramount and deeply regret that customers may be affected by this attack," Transport for NSW said. "Scammers may try to capitalise on these events. Customers should not respond to unsolicited phone calls, emails or text messages from anyone claiming to be from Transport for NSW related to any security matter."</p> <p>The attack comes a year after Transport for NSW was impacted by a cyber attack on Accellion's file transfer system. In February 2021, it revealed that some Transport for NSW information was taken before the attack on Accellion servers was interrupted.</p> <p>It wasn't the only NSW agency impacted by the Accellion attack either, as NSW Health admitted in June 2021 that its patient data was breached too. Identity information and health-related personal information were both accessed in the attack and it notified patients whose data may have been accessed as a result.</p> <p>This is despite the fact that the NSW government said in May last year that it was aiming to become a world leader in cyber security as part of a new economic strategy, including the launch of a Cyber Hub and a cyber security placement programme. It released a Cyber Security Strategy to create best practice and cyber resilience techniques that can be rolled out across the tech sector.</p>
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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	05/04 ISIS attacks in Syria decline
SOURCE	https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2022/05/04/isis-attacks-in-syria-have-declined-while-new-fighters-join-terror-cells/
GIST	<p>A significant drop in ISIS attacks in Syria is due to new fighters being integrated into the group, a terrorism monitor has said.</p> <p>The Counter Extremism Project (CEP), which keeps a monthly record of attacks by ISIS, suggests fighters freed in the Hassakeh prison break in January are joining new cells and being trained.</p> <p>Thousands of ISIS prisoners were believed to have initially escaped the Ghwayran jail in Hassakeh, Syria, when attackers detonated a car bomb near the prison gates.</p> <p>It led to a week of clashes inside and around the jail, which is run by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Hundreds died before US-led Kurdish forces recaptured the site.</p> <p>It is the largest prison holding ISIS detainees, with Human Rights Watch estimating it holds 12,000 men, including up to 4,000 foreign terrorist fighters. It is not known how many are still at large.</p>

In April, the CEP recorded seven deaths from at least six ISIS attacks in the Homs, Deir Ezzor and Hama regions.

CEP researcher Gregory Waters said he recorded a significant drop in activity and believed it could be because the escaped fighters are being trained and placed in terrorist cells.

"ISIS activity decreased significantly in April compared to March, matching the historic low points that occurred in January and July 2019," he said.

"This decrease in activity came despite no changes in the Syrian regime's security posture or any significant anti-ISIS operations. It is unclear why April was so quiet, but it appears to be a result of ISIS's own strategic decisions, rather than something imposed on the group by regime security pressure.

"The lack of any significant or co-ordinated anti-ISIS operations in central Syria raises interesting questions as to why ISIS has been so quiet here of late.

"I have previously raised the idea that ISIS is taking time to integrate prisoners it freed during the January Hassakeh prison attack into cells across central Syria. It is possible that this continues to be the case.

"Another possibility is that ISIS cells are using this time of low pressure to rest, refit, and plan more medium- and long-term attacks, such as infiltration attempts into southern Homs and the Damascus countryside."

There were no reports of ISIS attacks in Raqqa or Aleppo last month. It is the first time since November 2020 that both provinces have been quiet in the same month.

"There continues to be no major ongoing anti-ISIS operations this year in central Syria. While no new operations were conducted this month, Syrian forces and their foreign allies deployed in central Syria were reportedly on higher alert in anticipation of ISIS's Ramadan campaign," Mr Waters said.

"This historic lull in ISIS activity in central Syria occurred during Ramadan, when ISIS cells globally have increased the quantity and quality of their attacks."

In March, it was revealed that Iraq is building a concrete wall along part of its border with Syria to stop ISIS fighters from entering the country.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the wall was being built in an area facing the town of Al Shaddadi, in the south of Syria's Hassakeh province, where the jail break took place.

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HEADLINE	05/05 US report: deepening Afghanistan crisis
SOURCE	https://www.nwaonline.com/news/2022/may/05/us-report-details-deepening-afghan-crisis/?news-world
GIST	<p>The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the resulting cut in international aid has led to a worsening humanitarian crisis, according to the latest report by a Pentagon watchdog that has spent more than a decade tracking conditions in the war-torn nation.</p> <p>More than 24 million people are now in need of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, up from about 18.4 million last year, the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, or Sigar, said in a report late Tuesday.</p> <p>"Some 70% of households reported being unable to cover basic food and non-food needs, reflecting the impact of decline in household incomes," according to the study, citing State Department figures. It went on to cite reports of people selling their kidneys as evidence of how dire the situation has become.</p> <p>But on another ominous note, the report says conditions are likely to worsen. The country is suffering its worst drought in three decades. That was underway before a recent surge in food prices, fueled by the war</p>

in Ukraine, itself a major grain exporter. The United Nations has warned more than half of the country's 40 million people are facing acute hunger and a million children could die of starvation.

Afghanistan's economy has been in free fall partly because international aid, which accounted for 40% of gross domestic product, was abruptly cut back and the U.S. moved to block the central bank's access to some \$9 billion in overseas reserves.

Aid that had continued after the Taliban takeover in August 2021 is now at risk. In March the militant group reversed itself and abandoned a commitment to reopen high schools to girls. That prompted the World Bank to halt \$600 million in assistance.

The report also said Taliban authorities have continued their efforts to restrict the media by detaining journalists. The report cited a survey conducted by Reporters Without Borders and the Afghan Independent Journalists Association, which found that by the end of 2021, 231 media outlets out of a total of 543 had closed and the number of individuals working in media had dropped to 4,360 from 10,790.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Gaming have growing extremism problem?
SOURCE	https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/does-gaming-have-a-growing-extremism-problem-56874
GIST	<p>The surge of online gaming during the pandemic has allowed the far-right to exploit the industry. The far-right is an increasing threat in the gaming world, research has found.</p> <p>Gaming and game-adjacent platforms have grown into massive global entertainment industries, resulting in growth opportunities for extremist recruitment and organising.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the industry's hidden metrics, weak content moderation and indifferent attitude prevent it from effectively tackling the problem.</p> <p>Extremism in gaming is a "growing threat," Alex Newhouse, the deputy director at the Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism, said at a Games Developers Conference talk in March.</p> <p>"Games are becoming increasingly social...those social hooks provide the structures and the infrastructure for extremists to organize, mobilize and spread their hateful and extreme ideologies," Newhouse said.</p> <p>In their 2021 'State of Play' report, the Extremism and Gaming Research Network (EGRN) found that innovative efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism in gaming spaces are "nearly undetectable."</p> <p>EGRN noted how violent extremist organisations began exploiting the surge in online gaming during the Covid-19 pandemic, as radical groups sought to take advantage of younger audiences moving away from traditional social media platforms to alternatives like the chat application, Discord, and the live-streaming site, Twitch.</p> <p>"From neo-Nazis and far-right groups to ISIS [Daesh], those seeking to instigate hate and violence for their ideological ends are finding new platforms to do so as traditional social media platforms crack down on their content," the EGRN report said.</p> <p>Online games like Fortnite and gaming platforms like Steam are rife with extremist content and recruiters, EGRN said, adding that games themselves are not the problem, rather it is the socialisation that takes place inside gaming-related spaces.</p> <p>"While it may be a small number of players, compared to the billions of players, they are a very hardened, very influential, very dangerous group of people who are living their lives in these gaming spaces, with little to no consequences to their actions or behaviors," Rachel Kowert, research director at Take This, told <i>Axios</i>.</p>

Since much of player data is private, researchers lack a detailed overview of which games or platforms extremists use the most for their activities, nor has there been much cooperation with gaming studios to share that data.

This lack of existing data keeps solutions from emerging, as EGRN found most research on games and radicalisation was conducted on what are now “antiquated games”.

Furthermore, it said there is an unwillingness to come to terms with the size of the threat.

According to an Anti-Defamation League [report](#) in 2019, almost one in four multiplayer gamers said they have been “exposed to discussions about white supremacist ideology”.

The same report found that 53 percent of players who experience harassment believe “they were targeted because of their race/ethnicity, religion, ability, gender or sexual orientation”.

Gamification of the far-right

The entanglements between the far-right and global gaming subcultures are also much more complex than a simple case of extremist intervention.

The other side is what observers describe as the gamification of the radical right, which was recently analysed in a [report](#) published by the European Commission last year.

Take for example Breton Tarrant, the 28-year-old perpetrator of the mass shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand, who live-streamed the first shooting, which mirrored the practice of live-streaming in gaming community.

Similarly, the perpetrators of mass shootings in El Paso, Pittsburgh, and Halle in Germany followed an approach where they staged their bloody acts in game-like spectacles.

“The radical right’s interest in games is not an interest in games per se, but rather a fascination with the primordial, pre-cultural roots of humankind,” [wrote](#) researcher Yannick Lengkeek.

“Tapping into our play-hungry psyche is a tool as convenient as fake news, hate speech, or sleek symbolism packed with references to mythology and spirituality.”

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HEADLINE	05/04 Rising violence by separatists in Pakistan
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/world/asia/pakistan-baluchistan-violence.html
GIST	<p>KARACHI, Pakistan — Shari Baluch was a 30-year-old mother of two children and a schoolteacher. Late last month, on a university campus in Karachi, Pakistan’s biggest city, she detonated a suicide bomb, killing herself and four others, including three Chinese teachers.</p> <p>Releasing a photo of her wearing fatigues and flashing a victory sign, the Baluchistan Liberation Army claimed responsibility, extending a recent wave of deadly attacks by Baluch separatists.</p> <p>Baluch separatism is just one of the forces threatening the nation’s already tenuous unity and stability, including violent insurgencies by the Islamic State affiliate known as ISIS-K and the resurgent Pakistani Taliban.</p> <p>An ethnically fragmented nation of more than 200 million people, Pakistan has long suffered from lack of economic development, corruption and volatile politics. The nuclear-armed military and its feared intelligence service exert significant influence over governments, and in the past have overthrown them.</p> <p>Baluchistan is a large, arid province in southwestern Pakistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan. It has rich mineral resources and a long coastline, but only about 12 million people across an area roughly the size of</p>

Germany. Since Pakistan's founding in 1947, it has faced five insurgencies in the region, the most recent and persistent one underway since 2003.

Insurgent groups have fought repeatedly against political centralization and resource exploitation, in return facing [heavy state repression](#) and [human rights abuses](#).

China's Belt and Road Initiative is developing a [Chinese-operated deepwater port](#) in Gwadar, Baluchistan, and a transportation network linking Gwadar to China. Pakistan's government views such foreign investment as vital, and is eager to strengthen ties with China as a counterweight to Pakistan's archrival, India.

But to the separatists, the development projects put Beijing squarely on the side of the exploiters and oppressors, so in recent years, many targets of insurgent violence have been Chinese.

In 2018, B.L.A. militants killed four people in an [attack on the Chinese consulate in Karachi](#), and in 2020 the group mounted an [assault on the Pakistan Stock Exchange](#) in Karachi, which is 40 percent owned by Chinese investors, killing three people. In both cases, the assailants were also killed. Last August, a B.L.A. suicide bomber killed two children in an attack on Chinese nationals in Gwadar.

Ms. Baluch blew herself up last week near a van transporting Chinese language teachers for the Confucius Institute, a worldwide network of cultural centers financed by the Chinese government. The B.L.A. called the institute a "symbol of Chinese economic, cultural and political expansionism." Chinese development work must stop, it threatened, "otherwise our future attacks will be even harsher."

Pakistan has long complained that Baluch separatists operated out of hide-outs in Afghanistan, while the former Afghan government often accused the Pakistani intelligence agency, the ISI, of aiding the Taliban. After the Chinese consulate attack in 2018, a suicide bomber [killed the B.L.A. commander](#) and several associates — not in Pakistan, but in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Afghan officials blamed the ISI for that bombing.

By 2020, the Baluch insurgency had been greatly weakened by years of counterinsurgency operations, rifts among separatist groups, fatigue and government incentives for the militants to lay down their weapons. Pakistani officials hoped that the Taliban takeover last year would end Afghanistan's use as a haven for Baluch insurgents. After the Gwadar attack, the Taliban detained and expelled a large number of families of separatists, according to Baluch insurgent groups.

But the intensity and frequency of attacks started rising sharply last year, demonstrating the militants' growing sophistication and aggressiveness. The number of terrorist attacks in Baluchistan nearly doubled in 2021 compared to 2020, according to the [Pak Institute for Peace Studies](#), an Islamabad-based think tank, and the pace has kept rising this year. Insurgents have started resorting to suicide attacks, and the April 26 bombing in Karachi showed a new willingness to use women as assailants.

Image

One of the attackers being brought to a hospital in Karachi in 2018, after the Baluch Liberation Army killed four people in an attack on the Chinese consulate there. Credit...Saiyna Bashir for The New York Times

In February, B.L.A. militants staged twin assaults on two military posts in Baluchistan. Pakistan's military said that 20 attackers and nine military personnel were killed.

Days earlier, [an attack on another military post](#) by a different group, the Baluch Liberation Front, killed 10 soldiers.

The major separatist groups' leadership has shifted in recent years from traditional tribal chieftains living in self-exile in Europe to more militant former student leaders. The groups have also formed an

operational alliance to pool resources — one major reason the insurgency has intensified, security experts and officials said.

They also link the insurgency's upswing to its recruitment of youth, mainly students. The heads of two separatist groups formerly led a banned student group, the Baluch Students Organization-Azad, which operates clandestinely and, according to law enforcement officials, is a major source of insurgents. As a student, Ms. Baluch, the suicide bomber, was associated with the group, according to her family.

"Exposure of Baluch students studying in the country's prestigious universities, rising literacy and participation in ethnic politics are some major factors that have deepened awareness of socio-economic and political grievances among the youth," said Muhammad Amir Rana, director of the Pak Institute for Peace Studies.

In the town of Turbat, where Ms. Baluch taught science, a student claimed to have known at least five others who had joined the insurgency during the past two years. "They are mentally prepared to kill themselves for the cause," said the student, who insisted on anonymity out of fear for his safety.

Pakistan's security agencies have cracked down on educated Baluch youth, forcibly "disappearing" suspected militants, sometimes for years, without trial, according to news reports, student advocates and human rights groups.

"These days, law enforcement agencies consider every university student from Baluchistan a potential militant," said Faisal Nawaz, a student from Panjgur, in Baluchistan, who is studying at the University of Karachi.

Separatist attacks have been concentrated in the sparsely populated Makran region of Baluchistan, where residents depend on illegal cross-border trade with Iran in fuel and other commodities. In a desert area that has few job opportunities, smuggling can be a matter of survival. But the official border crossings were closed in March 2021, making the trade harder and worsening the misery of the local population.

"If the government set up industries for us, the youth would not be involved in dangerous business," said Sakhi Dad, 28, who said he took up smuggling after graduating from a university and failing to find other work.

In November, a protest movement led by a Gwadar-based cleric, Maulana Hidayatur Rehman, mobilized thousands of people, calling on the government to address the plight of people in Makran. They demanded relaxation of border trade, easing of security checkpoints created to protect Chinese workers at the Gwadar port, and an end to illegal trawling that is devastating the livelihood of local fishermen.

The government has responded with vows to improve conditions. On April 23, the new prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, in a visit to Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan province, cited neglect of the region as a cause of violence, and promised to "raise the issue of forced disappearances with powerful quarters."

Pakistan's military leadership has broadened its public interactions in Baluchistan, trying to present a friendlier face, particularly in Makran. After the February attacks, the army chief, Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa, and other military leaders visited Baluchistan to meet political leaders and university students, and asked the local administration to open the border to trade. He also encouraged the youth to join law enforcement agencies.

"For the first time, local leaders expressed their grievances and anger openly to the military's leadership," said a local political leader who attended the meeting with General Bajwa in Turbat in March. He requested anonymity to speak freely. "But without a political solution to bring an end to the long-running conflict, the insurgency will remain a challenge for Islamabad."

Less than two months after General Bajwa's visit, Ms. Baluch carried out her suicide attack.

HEADLINE	05/04 Dutch woman convicted: terror fundraising
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/virginia/articles/2022-05-04/dutch-woman-convicted-in-us-of-al-shabab-fundraising
GIST	<p>ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — A Dutch woman has been convicted of raising money for the Somali terrorist group al-Shabab, according to a federal prosecutor.</p> <p>Farhia Hassan, 38, was convicted Tuesday of conspiring to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization, Jessica Aber, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, said in a news release.</p> <p>Court records and evidence showed Hassan was involved for more than three years with a group of women from more than a dozen countries who ran a fundraising ring to provide financial support to al-Shabab.</p> <p>The women funneled cash payments directly to members of the terrorist group, coordinating the payments using online chatrooms, and it was used to fund safehouses and to purchase trucks and weaponry in support of al-Shabab, the news release said.</p> <p>Hassan was involved in fundraising in the Netherlands, falsely telling donors that money was raised to help charitable causes, the news release said.</p> <p>Hassan faces a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison when she is sentenced on July 22.</p> <p>Hassan was extradited last year from the Netherlands to the U.S. to face trial after a seven-year fight. Her lawyers argued that the U.S. lacked jurisdiction to charge a Dutch woman with giving money to a Somali terrorist group, but Judge Anthony Trenga ruled that the U.S. has a legitimate interest in prosecuting supporters of a designated terrorist organization.</p> <p>Two U.S.-based members of the fundraising ring were convicted in 2016 and sentenced to more than a decade in prison.</p> <p>Their defense argued that the amounts contributed by the women were negligible — a few thousand dollars in total — and that they intended the money to care for injured al-Shabab soldiers. They said providing funds for medicine in an armed conflict cannot be considered criminal under international treaties, and convicting someone for advocating for a cause violates the First Amendment.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	05/05 Loss of birds signals changing planet
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/may/05/canaries-in-the-coalmine-loss-of-birds-signals-changing-planet
GIST	<p>The world's birds, described as the planet's "canaries in the coalmine", are disappearing in large numbers as the colossal impact of humanity on the Earth grows, a global review has found.</p> <p>There are about 11,000 species of bird spanning the globe, but the populations of half of them are falling, while just 6% are increasing. Their flight and song make them easier to study than many animals, meaning they are the best studied large group.</p> <p>Bird populations are also affected by all the damage caused by human activity, from the destruction of wild habitat, the climate crisis, and pesticides and other pollution, to over-hunting and impacts of alien species and disease. This makes them the best living indicators of global change, the scientists said.</p>

Billions of birds have been lost in recent decades in North America and Europe alone, and while there are more species in the tropics, a higher proportion are at risk of extinction in temperate and largely richer nations, the review found.

Conservation efforts have been successful at rescuing individual species in specific locations from the brink, but political will and funding are needed to reverse the global decline, the researchers said.

“Birds are a much more powerful taxa [than others] to tell us a story about the health of the planet,” said Alexander Lees, at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, and who led the review. “We know so much about them – we don’t even know how many insect species there are.”

“Currently, we’re triaging the species at risk, but we’re not stopping the flow of species towards extinction,” he said. “There’s only so much we can do with site-based conservation.” While conservation work has improved populations of 70 species enough to lower their risk of extinction since 1988, 391 species have deteriorated, the review found.

Global data collated by Birdlife International underpinned the review and the conservation group’s CEO, Patricia Zurita, said: “Birds truly are the canary in the coal mine as indicators for the health of our planet, given their sensitivity to ecosystem changes, their ubiquity around the planet, and how well studied they are. [We] need to listen and act upon what birds are telling us, as they disappear ever faster.”

One exception to the broader decline is among water birds, where populations living in wetlands in North America and Europe have grown by 13% since 1970. The restoration of relatively small wetland areas can have a huge impact, while birds living in grasslands and forests need much bigger areas.

The review, [published in the journal Annual Review of Environment and Resources](#), found that 48% of bird species are known or suspected to be undergoing population declines, compared with 39% with flat trends, 6% showing increases and 7% with unknown trends.

Most long-term data is from Europe, North America, India and some sites in Africa but more recent monitoring in Latin America and Asia shows similar results. The population of birds in the US and Canada has [fallen by 3bn](#) since 1970, while [600m have disappeared](#) from Europe since 1980.

The review notes the extraordinary range of birds, from Antarctic petrels nesting 200km inland in Antarctica to the Hornby’s storm-petrel found nesting in the Atacama desert. A Rüppell’s vulture has been reported flying at an altitude of 11,300 metres, while emperor penguins can dive more than 500 metres below the sea surface. Birds have huge cultural value but are also vital to ecosystems, including dispersing seeds and eating pests.

Birds are affected by all the impacts of human activity. For example, 2.7m are estimated to die every year in Canada alone from eating pesticides, while domestic cats may kill 2.4bn a year in the US. The most threatened families of birds are those which are larger and take longer to reproduce, including parrots, albatrosses, cranes and stocky birds like the Australian brushturkey. All countries host at least one globally threatened bird species and 10 nations have more than 75, the review found.

Farmland species are declining precipitously, the review said, down 57% in Europe since 1980. This is due to the intensive agriculture that supplies cheap food, Lees said, adding: “If we want farmers to farm wildlife, we have to pay for that as a society.”

Individual species have been rescued, such as the Mauritius kestrel, which was down to one breeding female but has now been revived to a population of hundreds, and the Alagoas curassow in Brazil, which was extinct in the wild but has been restored from birds held by private collectors.

But the review concluded: “The growing footprint of the human population represents the ultimate driver of most threats to avian biodiversity. A lack of progress in conserving [birds] usually reflects a lack of resources or political will, rather than a lack of knowledge of what needs to be done.”

Prof Stuart Pimm, at Duke University, US, said the review was excellent and authoritative, even with the sparse availability of data in some regions. “What is certain is that about two-thirds of all bird species live in tropical forests, and human actions are shrinking those habitats,” said Pimm. “Even without detailed population estimates, their numbers are surely in decline.”

Lees said people need not feel powerless in helping to reverse the decline but added: “We all have connections [to birds]. If a company is associated with deforestation in Brazil, don’t buy stuff from them,” he said. “And if everyone spares as much land as possible within their gardens for nature, then that adds up to quite a large area. Another lever is voting – we get the politicians we vote for.”

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HEADLINE	05/04 Studies: US recycles 5% of plastic waste
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/04/us-recycling-plastic-waste
GIST	<p>When most people toss a plastic bottle or cup into the recycling bin, they assume that means the plastic is recycled – but a new report lays bare how rarely that actually happens.</p> <p>According to the Last Beach Cleanup and Beyond Plastics, the organization behind the report released on Wednesday, the recycling rate for post-consumer plastic was just 5% to 6% in 2021.</p> <p>The Department of Energy also released a research paper this week, which analyzed data from 2019, and came to the same number: only 5% of plastics are being recycled. The researchers on that report wrote that landfilled plastic waste in the United States has been on the rise for many reasons, including “low recycling rates, population growth, consumer preference for single-use plastics, and low disposal fees in certain parts of the country”, according to a press release.</p> <p>The problem has also been exacerbated by shifts in the global recycling market, including China’s 2017 ban on most US plastic exports. Countries such as China used to accept ships full of plastic waste from the US, says Jan Dell, founder of the Last Beach Cleanup, but without that option, more plastic is ending up thrown away, since few US facilities have the capacity to recycle it.</p> <p>“The rate of plastic recycling in the US has never been about 4% to 5% ever,” she says. “We don’t have factories to do it. It’s also very water intensive, so we’re not going to build more plastic recycling facilities in the US.”</p> <p>Around 85% of plastics end up in landfills, and the remaining 10% are incinerated, according to Dell’s research. And even when plastics are recycled, about a third of the material from a PET plastic bottle is discarded in the process.</p> <p>The Last Beach Cleanup and Beyond Plastics’s report also revealed that while plastic recycling is on the decline, the generation of plastic waste per person in the US has increased by 263% since 1980, from 60 pounds a person to 218 pounds a person, according to the report.</p> <p>Plastics stand out as egregiously wasteful in the world of recycling: paper is recycled at 66%, according to the American Forest and Products Association, while the figure for aluminum cans is about 50.4%, according to the EPA.</p> <p>“We can’t stay in the single use plastic nightmare scenario that we are right now,” says Dell. “There’s no way to sort our way out of this without reducing waste to start with.”</p> <p>Dell says that solutions exist to replace single-use plastics – for example, fiber-based food trays that can be composted or recycled. She says Nestle has replaced plastic with paper on candy in the UK – something they’re calling “paperification”. And of course, reusing and refilling bottles rather than tossing them after use also helps.</p>

	<p>She adds that the plastic producers have really been deceptive in slapping the triangular “chasing arrows” shape on the bottom of products and misleading people into thinking they are recyclable, when in fact the symbol does not guarantee that. “They have co-opted America’s love of recycling and the thought that we are doing something good for the environment, when they knew all along it wasn’t recycling,” she says. “They leveraged the heartstrings of consumers and said this stuff was recyclable.”</p> <p>Bans on single-use plastic items such as bags, food containers and utensils are increasingly popular, with versions adopted in places including the European Union, the state of California, and Los Angeles. But such rules need to go further, the report says. “Proven solutions that will reduce US plastic waste and pollution already exist and can be swiftly enacted. The success of single-use plastic bans, water refilling stations, and reusable food and dish ware can be extended nationwide.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 WA scientists to SKorea: study giant hornet
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/state-scientists-heading-to-south-korea-to-study-trapping-methods-of-asian-giant-hornet
GIST	<p>WHATCOM COUNTY, Wash. - Since 2019, Asian giant hornets have attacked honeybees in Washington, threatening everything from local gardens to billions of dollars of bee-pollinated crops.</p> <p>Scientists said the invasive bug also attacks other insects, and it has researchers worried about the impacts if the Asian giant hornet becomes established in the state.</p> <p>Spring is the time of year when queen hornets emerge and begin laying eggs to form a colony. However, even if scientists make it through the 2022 spring season without a hornet spotted, the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) said that won’t be enough to declare victory.</p> <p>"We still have a chance to eradicate them. But we won’t consider them eradicated until we have at least three years of no sightings and none caught in traps," said Karla Salp, public engagement specialist for the Washington State Department of Agriculture.</p> <p>WSDA has eradicated four Asian giant hornet nests—one in 2020 and three in 2021. It has been eight months since the invasive bug was detected in the state. It raises questions if all of them were exterminated.</p> <p>"The chances of us being done with this problem is very slim in reality," said Ted McFall, owner of McFall Beeyard in Custer.</p> <p>McFall is a third-generation beekeeper in Whatcom County. While he was creating new hives at his apiary ahead of the honey season, he was also preparing for what could be another deadly season for his colonies. In November 2019, the Asian giant hornet decapitated an entire hive of 60,000 bees.</p> <p>"It was the most bizarre thing that I’ve ever seen as a beekeeper—to show up to an otherwise healthy colony that should have been thriving and doing very well," said McFall. "Whenever this new thing showed up on our shores, I researched everything that I could possibly learn about them and we’re still learning."</p> <p>Through his research, McFall said he learned the killer hornets were after one thing.</p> <p>"Asian giant hornets can smell the larva inside the hive. And so they’ll go inside the hive and kill all the adult bees, and then they’re going to rip out their pupa and bring that pupa back home to their nest because the Asian giant hornet have a lot of larvae they need to feed," said McFall while pointing to larva inside one of his hives.</p>

WSDA said all four of the eradicated nests were related. It left researchers wondering if there are other connected nests out there, or if there are new queens that created new nests. New nests could be disastrous since a single nest can produce over 300 new queens.

"Are we going to find nine nests this season? We don't know. Are we going to find none? The good news is that after we removed that third nest last season, we didn't have any additional detections. So, that's promising in itself.

However, you just don't know because we don't have great traps for these hornets," said Salp.

Trapping the hornet is one thing-- to build a better trap, state entomologists are traveling to South Korea to learn prevention methods and about the hornets in general.

"Our hornets that were found in Washington were believed to be from [South Korea]. And so, we'll be working with some researchers there to do some additional research on things like trapping, trying to figure out some traps that work well. We also have colleagues in the U.S. Department of Agriculture that are heading to Japan also working on trapping," said Salp.

WSDA is also working on new technology to better detect and track the Asian giant hornet during flight in areas where they are more prevalent. The state is also accepting applications for new paid positions in Whatcom County for trapping. The job will start this summer and operate through the winter of 2022. WSDA is also preparing to launch a new volunteer program in June to support sighting and reporting efforts.

So far, most of the [trapping](#) has been done by community members, referred to as "[citizen scientists](#)" by WSDA. The state said more than half of its confirmed detections were from [public reports](#). That's thanks in part to so many people setting traps with materials provided by the state. McFall said public participation is crucial, especially for beehives like his at having a chance of survival.

"It's a lot harder for bees to make a good living nowadays. And so, the reality is that we don't need an additional problem for the bees, and especially something like the Asian Giant Hornet that shows up and slaughters entire colonies at once. It's not like it just kills some of them and then the colony recovers. It slaughters all of them," said McFall. "If the community was not involved, this would be a lost cause and we're just going to have to suffer bee slaughters. So luckily there's a good chance that we might be able to beat this thing just because so many people are looking for this thing."

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HEADLINE	05/04 Bellevue, King Co. pay cat owner \$125,000
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/every-cat-has-its-day-cat-owner-awarded-125k-in-court-from-king-co-bellevue
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - A Bellevue cat owner will now get \$125,000 from the city and King County after three years of litigation regarding the brown tabby cat.</p> <p>Anna Danieli owns Miska the cat, she filed a lawsuit in April 2019 over \$30,000 in fines and more than 30 violations for Miska's alleged misbehavior.</p> <p>The Regional Animal Services of King County (RASKC) has been issuing violations for Miska allegedly trespassing on a neighbor's property and taunting nearby pets since 2014.</p> <p>Danieli's legal team, according to a release from the team, was able to find numerous issues in both Bellevue and King County's actions. One of those was one neighbor complaint came from the person who is also the head of RASKC.</p> <p>The cat owner will get the money, along with a court order challenging Bellevue's City Code and how civil offenses involving animals are handled. The release claims there could be other victims to "the outdated code."</p>

	Meanwhile, both the county and city will involve Danieli on recommendations for policy improvements.
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	05/04 Feds extradite man: \$7M Covid fraud role
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/4/feds-make-first-ever-extradition-covid-fraud-accus/
GIST	<p>The federal government has managed to extradite a man accused of bilking the government out of more than \$7 million in COVID-19 money, marking the first person to be brought back from overseas to face prosecution.</p> <p>Authorities said Don V. Cisternino was brought back from Croatia to face wire fraud, identity theft and illegal monetary transactions charges.</p> <p>The government's willingness to get Mr. Cisternino back to the U.S. for prosecution marks a new chapter in attempts to police the hundreds of billions of dollars in pandemic assistance money that experts believe was stolen by fraudsters, much of it flowing overseas.</p> <p>"This matter demonstrates that the department will aggressively go after anyone who stole pandemic relief funds, whether they are in the United States or hiding overseas," Kevin Chambers, director of the Justice Department's COVID-19 fraud enforcement team, said Tuesday.</p> <p>Mr. Cisternino, who has an acting credit from an episode of the television show "ER," was living in Florida when the government was issuing pandemic relief, though it was his New York-based company, MagnifiCo, that he used to apply for funds through the Paycheck Protection Program.</p> <p>The program, known as PPP, was designed to help companies keep their doors open during the early days of the pandemic shutdowns.</p> <p>MagnifiCo claimed to have 441 employees and a monthly payroll of nearly \$3 million. It said it needed money to make payroll or pay rent. The company was approved for a \$7.2 million PPP loan.</p> <p>Investigators said Mr. Cisternino had no employees other than himself and his girlfriend, and he reported no wages to the IRS in 2019. Of the employees he claimed, 130 had made-up Social Security numbers, 150 were listed with real numbers that belonged to others, and three were dead when they were listed as MagnifiCo employees, an IRS agent told the courts.</p> <p>Investigators said the loan money was deposited into a single account and was used for plenty of things, but not for keeping the company afloat. Among the expenses that did register were \$89,413.71 at a Lincoln dealership, \$251,436.21 at a Mercedes-Benz dealership and \$48,477.26 for the "payoff" of a Maserati.</p> <p>Mr. Cisternino also appears to have bought a home in Chuluota, Florida, in the summer of 2020, for \$3.5 million. The Justice Department filed a forfeiture notice on that home in December 2020.</p> <p>That forfeiture may have spooked Mr. Cisternino. By the time he was indicted on criminal charges in February 2021, he couldn't be found.</p> <p>Croatian police nabbed Mr. Cisternino a year ago after he crossed the border from Slovenia, according to Croatian news reports.</p>

He told reporters at the time that he fled because he feared the Biden administration would crack down on fraud that was accepted during the Trump administration. In fact, the forfeiture was filed while President Trump was in office.

The government's seizure of the home was completed last summer, and Mr. Cisternino never contested it. The home's 12,579 square feet cover seven bedrooms, 11 bathrooms and a theater. It also has a "resort style" pool, tennis courts and a five-stall horse stable. Realtor.com listed the home as sold this year for a price of \$4.1 million.

The PPP program, run by the Small Business Administration, is just one of several pandemic assistance efforts beset by fraud.

Experts say more than \$150 billion, and perhaps more than \$250 billion, may have been stolen from enhanced unemployment benefits. A large chunk of that was stolen by overseas actors, including criminal syndicates with roots in Nigeria, Russia and Romania.

A Nigerian man pleaded guilty Tuesday to charges of wire fraud and aggravated identity theft in a scam that netted more than \$600,000 in unemployment benefits from 18 states. Abidemi Rufai also stole money from the Economic Injury Disaster Loans program, which like the PPP was run by the SBA.

Rufai was scamming the government even before the pandemic. The Justice Department said he filed 675 false tax claims with the IRS from 2017 to 2020. Most were unsuccessful, but Rufai did get \$90,877 from the IRS in bogus payments.

Rufai's jump from that relatively small fraud to the much larger unemployment fraud underscores the problem experts identified with the pandemic programs, which offered massive amounts of cash without requiring the kinds of basic identity checks that are common in the private sector.

Authorities say Rufai was arrested in May 2021 when he arrived at an airport in New York.

The Congressional Research Service reported last month that 20 of the 50 states were not using all the required cross-matching checks before paying out pandemic unemployment benefits.

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HEADLINE	05/04 NJ man jailed 14yrs; online dating scheme
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/us/nj-man-sentenced-online-dating-scheme.html
GIST	<p>A New Jersey man has been sentenced to 14 years in prison for his role in an online dating scheme in which he and others, posing as U.S. military personnel serving overseas, stole \$1.75 million from more than 40 victims over four years, federal prosecutors said.</p> <p>Rubbin Sarpong, 38, of Millville, pleaded guilty in November to charges of wire fraud, money laundering and tax evasion. In addition to the prison term, a federal judge also sentenced Mr. Sarpong on Tuesday to three years of supervised release and ordered him to pay more than \$3 million in restitution to 36 victims.</p> <p>From January 2016 to September 2019, Mr. Sarpong and his co-conspirators, most of whom live in Ghana, set up profiles on dating websites, including Plenty of Fish, Ourtime.com and Match.com, often claiming to be U.S. military service members stationed in Syria, federal prosecutors said in a complaint filed in U.S. District Court in New Jersey.</p> <p>After contacting victims, "wooing them with words of love" and initiating long-distance romantic relationships, Mr. Sarpong and his team asked for money, according to an F.B.I. investigator cited in the complaint. Many victims were told that the money would cover the cost of shipping gold bars that they had recovered or been awarded in Syria to the United States, and that they would be repaid once the gold bars were received. Victims mailed personal checks or cashier's checks or used money-transfer services to send money to various bank accounts mostly controlled by Mr. Sarpong, prosecutors said. About \$454,000 was sent to his co-conspirators in Ghana, the F.B.I. investigator said.</p>

None of Mr. Sarpong's collaborators, including a New Jersey-based American citizen, have been charged, a Justice Department spokesman said in a statement on Wednesday.

Despite having made \$1.14 million in taxable income using the scheme from 2016 to 2018, Mr. Sarpong didn't file tax returns or pay income taxes, the U.S. attorney's office for the District of New Jersey [said in a statement](#). He would have been obliged to pay \$387,923, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors said that Mr. Sarpong posted photos on Facebook and Instagram in which he posed with high-end cars, designer clothing, expensive jewelry and hefty stacks of cash, including \$100 bills. In one caption, Mr. Sarpong wrote, "Everything I Touch First Thing in the Morning" should "Turn into Money," according to the complaint. At least two others included the phrase "BloodyMoney."

In a caption for another photo displaying jewelry and a computer, prosecutors said, Mr. Sarpong boasted that he had been "blessed" by a Dubai millionaire, adding, "Real recognize real."

A photo from March 2017 shows Mr. Sarpong sitting in a car and holding a large stack of cash to his ear "like a cell phone," prosecutors said. A year later he posted another photo, this time as he held a wad of cash near his face. The authorities said he withdrew \$8,000 from a bank account around the time the photo was taken, after a victim had wired him more than \$20,000.

Mr. Sarpong and his accomplices used email accounts and voice-over-internet-protocol phone numbers to communicate with victims, the authorities said. In addition to money, they also instructed victims to send expensive electronics to a New Jersey-based co-conspirator, and promised that a computer they requested would be delivered to a soldier in Syria.

They made lofty claims about their fortunes, and used forged documents to bolster their falsehoods, according to the complaint. One co-conspirator told a victim he was working with a diplomat named Earle Litzenberger, who is the current U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan. A person posing as Mr. Litzenberger sent a separate email to the same victim. Both emails were later tied to the same IP address in Ghana, according to the complaint.

Posing as a U.S. service member stationed in Syria, one participant in the scheme claimed in an email in May 2018 that his unit had recovered millions of dollars in gold bars and asked a victim for money to cover the cost of shipping his share, which he said was valued at over \$12 million, to the U.S., prosecutors said.

That recipient wired about \$93,710 to two domestic bank accounts over subsequent weeks, according to the complaint. Much of it went to an account registered to a fake used car dealership, called "Rubbin Sarpong Autosales."

On June 13, 2018, the woman told her daughter she was going to the airport to meet a diplomat named Alwin Rolf Lyss, along with the gold. The next day, prosecutors said, the woman committed suicide.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Spokane police respond 6 shootings 24hrs
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/spokane-police-investigate-overnight-shooting/293-63883c5f-02ea-489b-b783-464e2748a6c2
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — For the sixth time this week, gunshots rang out in North Spokane overnight. Spokane Police responded to the shooting near North Perry Street and East Dalton Avenue just before 11 p.m. on Tuesday night. Police said that shots were fired between two vehicles that were driving through the area.</p> <p>A third vehicle, that was not involved, was hit by the gunfire. Police said the people inside that vehicle were able to get away to safety and were not hurt.</p>

Officers set up a large perimeter in the area and used K-9s and drones to try and find the shooting suspects. As of 12:30 a.m., police had not found the suspects and wound down their search in the area.

Police are now investigating whether this latest shooting is connected to any of the [five other reported shootings in the area this week](#). Those shootings were reported starting late Monday night and continued into early Tuesday morning.

In one of the shootings, a woman was shot multiple times and was seriously hurt. Police said it appears that a shooter, or shooters, walked up to a house in the [1600 block of East Dalton Avenue](#) and fired about 20 shots inside. Police said there were multiple children, including an infant, inside at the time of the shooting, along with several adults. The woman was the only person hit by the gunfire. Police say she was taken to the hospital with serious injuries.

At this time, the police hasn't released the name of the victim, but a [GoFundMe campaign](#) was established to support the woman, who, according to the verified GoFundMe page, she is recovering at the hospital from her injuries.

According to the GoFundMe campaign post, the money will go toward helping the woman's family pay for her expenses while she is at the hospital. The money raised will also help pay for the costs of her daughter, who is under the care of the woman's family. As of Wednesday, May 4, the GoFundMe fundraiser page has raised nearly \$8,500 from its \$30,000 goal.

No one was shot in the other incidents but several vehicles were hit by gunfire, [including a truck owned by Mike Fagan](#). He says he's worried for Spokane.

"I'm sure that the vast majority of the folks that live in Spokane right now will agree with my sentiment," Fagan said. "This is not the Spokane that I grew up with. I've lived in this particular house and in on this block for going on 30 years now. This place has been so peaceful, minimal crime, if anything."

[Spokane Mayor Nadine Woodward and Police Chief Craig Meidl recently formed a violent crimes task force](#). The task force is expected to address the [increasing trend of drive-by shootings](#) in the city.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Spokane shootings prompt call to action
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/spokane-shootings-prompt-call-to-action-city-leader/293-fb54f9da-081a-41f3-a929-7a0ae230ff74
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — After six shootings in 24 hours in Spokane, city leaders are calling for more change to address this unsettling trend.</p> <p>Spokane police provided data of the total shootings so far in 2022 (January through end of April), compared to the same time frame in 2021. The data does not include the six recent shootings.</p> <p><u>2022:</u> Total Shootings: 53 (26 of total are classified as drive-by shootings)</p> <p><u>2021:</u> Total Shootings: 45 (12 of total are classified as drive-by shootings)</p> <p>So far, we've seen 8 more shootings than last year. But what really stands out is drive-by shootings have more than doubled.</p> <p>The six recent shootings all happened in Spokane City Council member Michael Cathcart's district.</p>

"It's really frustrating," Cathcart said. "80 percent of the time it seems like they are in my district."

He believes violent crime in Spokane is out of control. Following the string of recent shootings, Cathcart posted a list of what he thinks the city needs to combat this unsettling trend.

It includes more police officers and using a neighborhood-focused policing strategy.

"We've got a lot of community members who will tell you that from their perception and perspective, they don't often see officers in their neighborhoods, they don't have a sense of safety in their neighborhoods," Cathcart said.

Neighborhood focused policing would mean creating a visible presence of police officers. That would be either officers on foot or bike patrol in Spokane neighborhoods. But, Cathcart admits the city needs to hire more officers to do this successfully.

He wants to pilot this strategy in Hillyard to see how this could help deter crime.

Cathcart is also calling for the return of commissioner resource officers in Spokane Schools. That's because he said law enforcement is seeing more youth involved in gang activity.

"Those resource officers would play as sort of the front lines and identifying kids who might be headed down a bad path," Cathcart said. "They can intercede and have an opportunity to maybe talk to the parents before they fall into a lot of these problems."

He also joins Mayor Nadine Woodward and Police Chief Craig Meidl in wanting more accountability for repeat offenders in our court system.

"I think our emphasis should be on community safety and justice for the victims who've been who have been victimized," Cathcart said.

During the shootings Sunday night, someone shot about 20 rounds inside a woman's home. Even though there were children inside at the time, the woman was the only one injured. Police have not identified the victim.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Glock switch: handguns into machine guns
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/atf-sees-rise-in-quarter-sized-glock-switch-that-turns-handguns-into-machine-guns-bureau-of-alcohol-tobacco-firearms-explosives-bullets-semi-automatic-weapon
GIST	<p>BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (WBMA) – The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives is investigating more incidents involving a quarter-sized device that transforms a semi-automatic weapon into what's qualified as a machine gun.</p> <p>Without a Glock switch, a semi-automatic pistol fires one bullet per trigger pull and can only fire as quickly as the operator pulls the trigger.</p> <p>With a switch, one trigger pull can clear out a 30-round magazine clip in less than two seconds; in one minute, the gun could fire 1,200 rounds.</p> <p><i>"That's a lot of bullets going downrange, and it's a great risk to everyone involved," said Mickey French, the Special Agent in Charge for ATF's Nashville Division, which covers Alabama.</i></p> <p>Not only are an enormous amount of bullets being released at one time, but the power of the modified gun makes it difficult for the operator to control.</p>

"The muzzle likes to rise. Novices will be unable to keep the rounds impacting the paper at 21 feet," said ATF Special Agent, Morgan Madison.

Madison has a significant amount of training with automatic weapons. Even for him, it was difficult to stay on target.

"I've shot AK-47, MP-5s, all sorts of fully automatic weapons and this one was the most difficult to control that I have found," he said.

The switches aren't new, but they've been on the rise recently.

"We are seeing them trickle from West to East," said French. "We started seeing a great majority of them in Memphis and the western parts of Tennessee all over the past year and a half. Within the past year though, we've seen a tremendous increase."

There are over 80 open investigations for the ATF Nashville Division, with 100 recovered so far. There are 1,500 ATF investigations involving the devices nationwide. Some of those cases come from Alabama.

"We have offices in Huntsville, Birmingham, Mobile and Montgomery and we have recovered or dealt with these in all four of those major metropolitan cities," said French.

ATF has tracked down switches in both Mobile and Montgomery. Tuscaloosa police recovered devices last summer.

"The first officer, he didn't know what it was. He turned it into evidence and then they figured it out that it was a Glock switch that had been attached to a regular pistol," said Stephanie Taylor, Public Information Officer for Tuscaloosa Police Department.

Many officers across the state and country are now being trained to recognize the devices.

"It is an officer safety situation because if they came up against someone who was firing a gun like this, that has this kind of power, they aren't going to be outmatched necessarily because they are very well trained, but they are definitely out-gunned. They don't have that kind of firepower and it's scary," said Taylor.

French said ATF is working to ensure local and state agencies are aware of the dangers to themselves and the general public. He explained that most switches are being bought online and sent to the U.S. They are typically shipped in boxes marked as something different.

"They are hidden in how they are marketed and that's what the challenge is for law enforcement when we also don't have the ability to regulate other countries," said French. "ATF, every time we identify them we are taking steps to close those sites down but they are just popping up."

He added the ATF has started to see switches that are 3-D printed.

If a gun has a switch on it, there is a small piece that extends further off the back of the gun. The device is typically black and some even have the Glock logo on them, even though they are not associated with the manufacturers. French said the 3-D printed versions can come in several colors.

The punishment for having a Glock switch starts at 10 years in prison and can go up from there, depending on other factors.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Rising gas prices fuel Anacortes gas thefts
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/gas-thefts-on-the-rise-with-gas-prices-at-record-highs-in-anacortes

GIST	<p>ANACORTES, Wash. — John Willoughby, owner of Zap Automotive, sees many types of car repairs that keep his shop in business. But one vehicle problem he hates to see is when vehicles have been damaged by thieves who stole gasoline.</p> <p>"I care about my neighbors and my friends that are here in town and it's very unusual to see," he said. "I've lived here 50 years and it's very unusual to see."</p> <p>Officials with the Anacortes Police Department say rising gas prices, which have been stuck at near-record highs recently, are driving up gas thefts this year.</p> <p>The number is so high that the department is now coding the reports.</p> <p>"When people understand restrictions that are placed on police and begin to see fuel theft as a lower risk activity in terms of being caught and held accountable, they're more emboldened to continue that behavior," said police Sgt. Terrance Clifford.</p> <p>According to the department, police have investigated more than 24 citywide reports of fuel theft since January compared to just four cases in all of 2021.</p> <p>Thirteen of those thefts were reported over the last two months, investigators said.</p> <p>Vehicle owners can take steps to prevent their gas from being stolen.</p> <p>Most newer model cars have caps and locks to prevent fuel thefts but thieves are drilling into tanks to steal gas.</p> <p>KOMO News found multiple police reports in which thieves drilled right into the tank which can be dangerous when power tools are used so close to flammable fuel.</p> <p>"A small spark would ignite the entire thing," Willoughby said. "And the individual would be trapped under the car because they would be in an area where they would be drilling."</p> <p>KOMO News found that other police departments in cities of similar size, like Mount Vernon and Monroe, reports of gas thefts are not as high.</p> <p>So why Anacortes?</p> <p>"We have the highway, we have state and county ferry terminals, numerous marinas, parks with trailheads, forest lands," Clifford said.</p> <p>Spots, where people park and leave their cars, will only become more popular statewide as we head into the warmer months.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Colombia extradites Gulf Clan leader to US
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/colombia-extradites-feared-head-of-gulf-clan-to-us/
GIST	<p>BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Colombia extradited the alleged head of the feared Gulf Clan, who had been the country's most wanted drug lord before his capture, to the United States Wednesday where he faces indictments in three federal courts.</p> <p>Colombian President Iván Duque said Dairo Antonio Úsuga David is "comparable only to Pablo Escobar," referring to the late former head of the Medellin drug cartel.</p> <p>"He is not only the most dangerous drug trafficker in the world, but he is murderer of social leaders, abuser of boys, girls and adolescents, a murderer of policemen," Duque said accompanied by Colombia's military leaders whom he congratulated for guarding Úsuga David and capturing him in October 2021.</p>

The former rural warlord, better known by his alias Otoniel, had stayed on the run for more than a decade by corrupting state officials and aligning himself with combatants on the left and right. He was transferred Wednesday in handcuffs and wearing a helmet and a bulletproof vest from a prison in Bogotá to a heavily guarded military transport air field.

He's long been a fixture on the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's most-wanted list. He was first indicted in 2009, in Manhattan federal court, on narcotics charges and for allegedly providing assistance to a far-right paramilitary group designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. government. Later indictments in Brooklyn and Miami federal courts accused him of importing into the U.S. at least 73 metric tons of cocaine between 2003 and 2014 through countries including Venezuela, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, and Honduras.

Úsuga David's also cycled through the ranks of several guerrilla groups, most recently claiming to lead the Gaitanist Self Defense Forces of Colombia, after a mid-20th century Colombian leftist firebrand.

The Colombian government began the capo's extradition after the State Council lifted a provisional suspension of an order by Duque endorsing the move. The high court dismissed a petition from a group of Úsuga David's victims who argued that his extradition would violate their rights to justice and reparation. They wanted him to first face the more than 128 proceedings against him in Colombia. .

Duque said that from the United States, Úsuga would continue collaborating with the Colombian authorities in the investigations against him and once he completes his sentences for drug trafficking, he will return to "Colombia to pay for the crimes he committed."

The Gulf Clan's army of assassins terrorized much of northern Colombia to gain control of major cocaine smuggling routes through thick jungles north to Central America and onto the U.S.

As he defied authorities for years, his legend as a bandit grew alongside the horror stories told by Colombian authorities of the many underage women he and his cohorts allegedly abused sexually.

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HEADLINE	05/04 KCSO SWAT fatally shoots assault suspect
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/king-county-swat-team-fatally-shoots-suspect-in-federal-way/
GIST	<p>A King County Sheriff's Office SWAT team fatally shot a man suspected of a felony assault with a firearm following a pursuit Wednesday in Federal Way, authorities say.</p> <p>Police did not say how many officers were involved in the shooting.</p> <p>Around 10:23 a.m., Sheriff's Office detectives located the man, who had a warrant out for his arrest, according to a news release from the Valley Independent Investigative Team, which is investigating the incident and consists of seven South King County police departments.</p> <p>The detective unit along with a SWAT team contacted the man who was in a vehicle and tried to take him into custody, but the man fled after hitting the occupied patrol vehicles, according to the release. A pursuit followed.</p> <p>Officers stopped the man's vehicle near South 317th Street and 28th Avenue South in Federal Way, according to the investigative team.</p> <p>SWAT officers tried to take the man into custody again but "encountered a lethal threat," and deputies shot the suspect, according the release. He died at the scene.</p>

	<p>As of Wednesday night, authorities had not said what the lethal threat entailed, and gave no details of the man's identity or the crime for which the sheriff's office considered him a suspect.</p> <p>Further, no details were released about how law enforcement approached the man before the pursuit or after his vehicle was stopped.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Hotel worker shoots man; threaten w/knife
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article261067507.html
GIST	<p>An employee at a hotel on South Hosmer Street in Tacoma shot and injured a 45-year-old man Tuesday night who police say pulled a knife and attacked a man and two women.</p> <p>Police said hotel employees called 911 immediately after the shooting to report what occurred. The man was taken to an area hospital with a non-life-threatening gunshot wound. Police said no one else was injured.</p> <p>Tacoma Police Department officers were called about 11:49 p.m. to the Quality Inn & Suites at 8810 S. Hosmer St. Spokesperson Wendy Haddow said a 911 caller reported that an employee had just shot a man.</p> <p>Haddow said police have trespassed the man from the property before. On Tuesday night, he returned to the business. Employees asked him to leave, but he refused.</p> <p>Police said the man, 45, then attacked two employees and a bystander while armed with a knife. Haddow didn't have details of the attack. She said a 32-year-old woman shot the man once.</p> <p>A front desk employee who asked that their name not be used told The News Tribune that the incident began at the beginning of the night shift. They said the hotel has dealt with difficult situations in the past, but this was a first.</p> <p>"Nothing like that has ever happened that drastically," the employee said. "The street is wild. We try to handle it as best as we can."</p> <p>The employee worked through the night and was still on shift Wednesday morning.</p> <p>Haddow said after the man who was shot is released from the hospital, he will be booked into Pierce County Jail for investigation of three counts of first-degree assault.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/05 Plea for Alabama jail officer to turn self in
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/05/us/alabama-vicky-white-casey-white-search-thursday/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Investigators are pleading for Alabama corrections official Vicky White to turn herself in as the search for her and the inmate she disappeared with enters its seventh day.</p> <p>"Vicky, you've been in this business for 17 years, you've seen this scenario play out more than once and you know how it always ends," Lauderdale County Sheriff Rick Singleton said Wednesday on ABC's Good Morning America. "Go ahead and end it now. Get to a phone, call 911, turn yourself in and help us get Casey White back behind bars because you know that's where he's going to eventually end up."</p> <p>Over the last week, authorities have discovered the officer, 56, and inmate Casey White, 38, had a romantic relationship and that Vicky White visited him multiple times in her off-hours while he was in state prison, according to Singleton.</p> <p>The pair, who are not related, disappeared Friday morning when the corrections officer said she was taking Casey White to the courthouse before going to get medical attention because she felt unwell. But the two never showed up at the courthouse and the officer didn't make it to the medical facility.</p>

In the days since they went missing, investigators have determined the officer and inmate had a "special relationship" in which Vicky White afforded the inmate special privileges including extra food. The investigation was aided, in part, by inmates who informed officials of the relationship over the weekend.

"Some of the inmates here in our facility sent word to our investigators that there was a relationship between the two," Singleton told CNN on Wednesday. "We took their statements, what they said, followed up on it and we did confirm that in fact there was a relationship there."

Vicky White, who was set to retire the day she went missing, had also made some major financial moves leading up to the escape.

She sold her home on April 18 for well below market value. The house sold for \$95,550, according to documents, but Lauderdale County records show list the home's total parcel value to be \$204,700.

Relatives and coworkers say they are stunned by the sudden disappearance of the corrections official, who Singleton has described as a "model employee" with an "unblemished record."

Vicky White has an active warrant out for her arrest on charges of permitting or facilitating escape in the first degree. She is also no longer employed by the Lauderdale County Sheriff's Office, the office said in a statement Wednesday. While Friday was her last day of work, her retirement papers were never finalized, the office said.

Here are the key developments in the investigation as authorities desperately search to find the pair.

Video captures quick escape

Officials say Vicky White, who was the assistant director of corrections, brazenly violated department policy when she took Casey White from the jail Friday morning.

The facility had a policy requiring that two sworn deputies accompany inmates at all times, including during transportation to the courthouse. Singleton said that policy was emphasized with Casey White after authorities discovered he had a plot to escape custody and take a hostage in 2020 and uncovered a makeshift knife on him.

But that morning, Vicky White asked an officer to prepare Casey White for transport, saying she would take him by herself to the courthouse since the other officers had already left for court and she was the only officer available with a certified firearm, Singleton said.

Surveillance video shows Casey White, shackled and handcuffed in an orange jumpsuit, being escorted into the back of Vicky White's patrol vehicle Friday morning.

The investigation has revealed the pair then drove to a shopping center parking lot less than 10 minutes away, left the patrol car in the lot and escaped in a gold- or copper-colored Ford Edge SUV with minor damage to the rear left bumper, authorities said.

"We know that there was never any effort to go to the courthouse. They went straight to Florence Square parking lot, dumped the patrol car, got in the other vehicle and left," Singleton said.

Relationship began in 2020, sheriff says

Investigators have traced the relationship to early 2020 when Casey White was brought to Lauderdale County for an arraignment on murder charges he is facing for the 2015 death of 58-year-old Connie Ridgeway, according to the sheriff.

"As far as we know that was the earliest physical contact they had," Singleton said.

It was then that authorities found the homemade prison knife on the inmate and uncovered his plan to escape, leading the Lauderdale detention facility to reinforce its policy that he should be accompanied by two deputies at all times while in its custody.

Casey White was returned to state prison after the arraignment to continue carrying out a 75-year sentence for a series of crimes he committed in 2015. The sheriff says the officer and inmate maintained communication, including visits from Vicky White in her off-hours.

Casey White was brought back to the Lauderdale County jail in February to attend court hearings related to his murder charges.

Over the course of this week's investigation, inmates said that Casey White "was getting extra food on his trays" and "was getting privileges no one else got. And this was all coming from her," Singleton said.

Investigation set back by release of a lead

Leading up to their escape, Vicky White purchased a 2007 Ford Edge SUV in Rogersville, about 25 miles east of Lauderdale County, according to Singleton. The night before she disappeared with Casey White, the officer parked the car in the shopping center parking lot where the pair would drive to the next day and flee in the SUV.

When investigators were finally able to confirm the description of the escape car Monday, they intended to send it internally to other law enforcement agencies, but the lead was accidentally released to the public.

"The description of the car is what we worked on hard all weekend because we had no clue what kind of vehicle they left in," Singleton told CNN's Don Lemon on Wednesday night. "We put the word out to law enforcement to be on the lookout and inadvertently one of those agencies sent the description out publicly. That really set us back."

Singleton said the pair has likely ditched the car by now because the description is being widely shared.

But investigators have gathered other leads on the possible location of the inmate and officer, he said.

"We've got several tips ... especially east of the Mississippi," the sheriff said, but added that authorities still "do not have any clue where they're at."

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HEADLINE	05/05 NYPD overtime to surpass allotted budget
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/nypd-overtime-budgeted-crime-policing-experts
GIST	<p>The New York Police Department has blown through \$564.2 million in its overtime budget, and is projected to spend \$750 million in overtime in all of fiscal year 2022 – far beyond the \$607.3 million allocated for the year, according to the city’s Independent Budget Office.</p> <p>The NYPD – said to be the largest police force in the country – is projected to surpass its budgeted overtime expenditures by \$142.7 million for fiscal year 2022, which runs through June, according to IBO data provided to Fox News Digital and first reported by Bloomberg. If the office’s projections ring true, the NYPD will have spent the second-highest amount of overtime, behind 2020 with \$837.5 million, in the six years provided by IBO.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the office noted that the statistics reflect all NYPD overtime, including that for civilian members, but more than 80% comes from uniformed officers.</p> <p>But what is causing such high overtime expenditures?</p> <p>"I would guess that this fiscal year, with the violence being up as high as it has been, they’ve been doing more and more of that violence reduction overtime. It’s putting the extra cops out on the streets," said</p>

Terence Monahan, who served as the NYPD's Chief of Department – the highest-ranking uniformed police officer – from 2018 to 2021, under Police Commissioners Dermot James O'Neill and Dermot Shea.

"Plus, now events are happening. Parades are happening again. Parades always come into overtime because it takes a lot of personnel," he added.

Monahan, who spent just months shy of 40 years with the department, told Fox News Digital it is not unusual for the NYPD to go over budget in terms of its overtime spending, but noted that OT costs in 2021 were as low as they were – \$480.50 million – because there was "such a squeeze on everything we did."

"Plus, there were no events, there were no parades – everything was canceled, which helped somewhat on the overtime," he said. But the department also "didn't do any of our violence reduction overtime that summer, which led to the most violent summer the city's ever seen."

Monahan later went on to work for New York City's Economic Development Corporation as a senior advisor for recovery, safety and planning, before forming Monahan Consulting, LLC, where he now serves as CEO.

Asked if he had a response to those who might say the officers are trying to take advantage of the department's overtime system, he said, "Absolutely not."

"Sometimes, we gotta force cops to take the overtime," he explained. "You know, they work on a schedule and occasionally they get Friday and Saturdays off, and now they're being told they gotta come in because we need extra coverage."

He added: "So, sometimes you're forcing people to come in to work that don't want to be there to make sure that everything that needs to be covered is covered."

So far in 2022, police have grappled with high crime rates and reverberations from changes made in prior years, explained Monahan and Maria "Maki" Haberfeld, chair of the Law and Police Sciences Department at New York City's John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

Total crime year-to-date as of May 1 remained high compared to the same time in 2021, with a 41.6% increase, the NYPD's latest crime statistics show. Shootings and murders were down year-to-date and for last month, compared to April 2021, the department said.

The department, at the urging of Mayor Eric Adams, has diverted more officers to new and pre-existing units to tackle specific target issues, such as subway crime and gun violence.

On March 16, the NYPD unleashed [its new Neighborhood Safety Teams](#), a unit that replaced the embattled Anti-Crime Unit in targeting gun crimes citywide. So far the NYPD has deployed teams to the 30 police precincts that make up 80% of the gun violence, and has made at least 2,300 arrests so far, Adams said.

And a month earlier, Adams unveiled his Subway Safety Plan, which took effect on Feb. 21 and took a zero-tolerance approach toward transit systems loiterers, turnstile-jumpers and criminal opportunists. The program was also aimed at providing services to homeless individuals and those experiencing mental health difficulties.

The program further called for "an increased presence of NYPD officers in subway cars and on platforms" as part of the city's plans announced in January to deploy more than 1,000 more officers to the subway system.

John Jay's Haberfeld, also a multi-published author on topics including "Police Leadership" and "Enhancing Police Integrity," among several others, attributed the high overtime expenditures to "an unprecedented separation" in the department in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd and the

subsequent news coverage of law enforcement. "Separation" refers to the number of officers who have left to the department.

"People retired early or just left the force," she said. "This by itself necessitated additional overtime just to make sure that the coverage is there – thousands of officers retired."

About 2,686 personnel resigned from the police department in 2021 – with 1,032 resigning and 1,654 retiring, according to figures provided to Fox News Digital. And 3,152 NYPD members left in 2020, with 2,599 of them choosing to retire.

The NYPD has lost 912 uniformed members so far this year as of May 3, with 380 resigning and 532 retiring, data show.

As for current staffing, the NYPD boasted 35,234 uniformed officers as of May 3, police department statistics show. It's about 230 people more than the budgeted headcount for FY 2022 and in FY 2023's proposal, but lower than the nearly 36,000 members allotted in FY 2020, which Monahan described as a "good number."

The Citizens Budget Commission, a nonpartisan New York-focused group, reported in March 30, 2022 that there were 1,410 vacancies within the Big Apple police department.

Haberfeld also pointed to the ranks of those who chose to leave the department.

"It's not just about numbers. It's about who retires. If you have a large number of supervisors who retired, which was also the case because too many officers took an early retirement... this required additional overtime for other supervisors."

But she added that there are "a number" of factors contributing to this, including the "unprecedented rise in crimes." Police are racking up overtime while attempting to counter the surge "both reactively and proactively."

"Reactively, because the calls for service are much higher than before due to this unprecedented rise in crime," she went on. "And proactively trying to come up with the tactical deployment programs and as a solution to try to bring it to a manageable level."

"The only way" to target immediate crime concerns is by bolstering police deployments, she said.

"My opinion is that the city is out of control when it comes to crime. And on a daily basis, we have violent crime, shootings, stabbing," Haberkfeld continued. "If it was up to me, I would put twice as many officers on the street, because it's not that the mere presence of officers will, you know, eliminate the problem, but it will certainly serve as a serious deterrent to street crime ... this is not something that's going away."

Last month, Adams announced in his proposed FY 2023 budget that he was putting \$5.59 billion toward the NYPD budget, compared to the department's \$5.44 billion budget from the previous year.

"This is not spending, this is investing," the mayor said at the time, according to local news station NY1.com. "A safe city is going to be a productive city."

The money would go, in part, to overtime costs, as well as to fund efforts related to his Subway Safety Plan and toward the new Neighborhood Safety Units.

"We cannot have a city where people are afraid to walk the streets, ride the subway, or send their children to school," he said, when making the April 26 budget announcement. "And our first 100 days, crime and tragedy looked far too many times and took lives of innocent people."

	He later added: "Our sister Michelle Go was pushed to her death in front of a train, an act of horrifying hatred ... Dozens more of our neighbors have been killed by gun violence. Unhoused New Yorkers were shot while they were sleeping on the street. An inspiring rapper was executed in cold blood. A 19-year-old girl was killed as she worked the night shift in East Harlem. We saw a grandmother wounded, six bullets in a young girl. An 11-month-old baby shot in the head. And two of our police officers were shot dead responding to a call."
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HEADLINE	05/04 Madeleine McCann disappearance solved?
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/prosecutor-says-theyve-solved-madeleine-mccanns-disappearance-with-naming-of-suspect-christian-bruckner?ref=home
GIST	<p>Fifteen years to the day after British toddler Madeleine McCann disappeared from her parents' holiday resort hotel room in Portugal, prosecutors say they have solved the case.</p> <p>Hans Christian Wolters, the lead German prosecutor in a new investigation of the May 3, 2007 disappearance, told the Portuguese television show Sabado that the new evidence was undeniable. "We have found new facts and new evidence," he told the program. "It's not forensic evidence but evidence and because of our evidence, we are sure he is the murderer of Madeleine McCann. We are sure he killed Madeleine."</p> <p>Wolters was referring to Christian Brückner, who was formally named as a suspect last week, years after emerging as a person of interest in McCann's disappearance. A German documentary crew reported earlier this year that Brückner worked as a handyman at the Praia da Luz resort where the McCanns were staying. He is serving time for the rape of a 72-year-old American woman not far from where McCann disappeared and is under investigation for the rape and strangling death of a 13-year-old boy and the disappearance of a 5-year-old girl.</p> <p>Prosecutors in Germany confiscated a camper Brückner was living in, and various media reports say fibers that may be consistent with the pink pajamas McCann wore the night she vanished have been found. Wolters neither confirmed nor denied the report to the Portuguese news station.</p> <p>"Is it true that you have found something of Madeleine McCann in Christian Brückner's van?" the presenter asked. "I'm not going to comment on the details of the investigation," he replied.</p> <p>The presenter then asked, "But you can't deny it?" to which Wolters answered, "I don't want to deny it."</p> <p>Lawyers for Brückner said that's "bullshit."</p> <p>Brückner previously said he couldn't be the suspect because he was having sex when McCann disappeared. While he said he cannot remember the woman's name, he did say through his lawyers that she was barred from leaving Portugal over illegal pepper spray she had in her hand luggage. Wolter says he may have found the records for that woman. "What we found out, it all went in the other direction, so was rather incriminating, without me being able to elaborate on that now," he said.</p> <p>The McCanns are instead preparing to celebrate what would be their daughter's 19th birthday by putting a gift in her room, which has not been changed since she disappeared. They said through a spokesman they still hold hope their daughter is alive.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/04 Gamer pleads guilty in fatal 'swatting' case
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/kansas-gamer-pleads-guilty-role-fatal-swatting-case-84496912
GIST	WICHITA, Kan. -- A Kansas man has pleaded guilty to his role in a hoax call that led to a fatal shooting of an innocent bystander by Wichita police in 2017.

Shane Gaskell, 23, pleaded guilty Tuesday in federal court to wire fraud in case that drew national attention to “swatting,” during which a caller falsely reports a crime that is dangerous enough to send a SWAT team to the location, The Wichita Eagle reported.

The “swatting” call on Dec. 28, 2017, led to the death of 28-year-old Andrew Finch, who was shot by Wichita police as he opened the door of his home to see why police were outside.

In his plea Tuesday, Gaskell said he got into an argument with another online gamer, Casey Viner, of North College Hill, Ohio, and gave him an old address. Viner recruited another gamer, Tyler Barriss, of Los Angeles, to falsely report a shooting and kidnapping at Gaskell's old address. A Wichita officer shot Finch after responding to Barriss' call.

After hearing about the fatal shooting, Gaskill suggested Viner and Barriss “alter or destroy their communications” with him and deleted his message threads, his plea agreement says.

Federal prosecutors initially agreed to an 18-month pretrial diversion program for Gaskill that would have allowed several original charges to be dropped. But prosecutors resumed prosecution in September 2021 after they said Gaskill violated the terms of his diversion.

Gaskill will be sentenced July 21.

Barriss is serving 20 years in federal prison after pleading guilty in April 2019 to 51 counts associated with the Wichita swatting and other hoax emergency calls across the U.S.

Viner was sentenced in September 2019 to 15 months in prison after pleading guilty to conspiracy and obstruction of justice.

The officer involved in the shooting was not charged.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Oath Keepers pleads guilty Jan 6 riot role
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/oath-keeper-nc-pleads-guilty-seditious-conspiracy-84503045
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON -- A North Carolina man pleaded guilty on Wednesday to conspiring with other members of the far-right Oath Keepers militia group to forcefully halt the peaceful transfer of power after President Joe Biden's 2020 electoral victory.</p> <p>William Todd Wilson, 44, of Newton Grove, North Carolina, is the third Oath Keepers member to plead guilty to a seditious conspiracy charge stemming from the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.</p> <p>Brian Ulrich, 44, of Guyton, Georgia, pleaded guilty to the same charge last Friday. Joshua James, 34, of Arab, Alabama, was the first Oath Keepers member to plead guilty to seditious conspiracy.</p> <p>Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes, 55, of Granbury, Texas, and eight others linked to the group have pleaded not guilty to seditious conspiracy and other charges. A trial for some of them is scheduled to start in July.</p> <p>Unlike James and Ulrich, Wilson wasn't charged in the initial January 2022 indictment for the seditious conspiracy case.</p> <p>The charge is rarely employed. Before January, the last time U.S. prosecutors brought such a seditious conspiracy case was in 2010 in an alleged Michigan plot by members of the Hutaree militia to incite an uprising against the government.</p> <p>Wilson was an Oath Keeper member since 2016 and a Sampson County leader of the group's North Carolina chapter, according to a court filing. The filing describes him as a military and law enforcement veteran but doesn't include any details of his service.</p>

“Some members of the Oath Keepers, like Wilson, believe that the federal government has been coopted by a cabal of elites actively trying to strip American citizens of their rights,” the filing says.

Wilson brought a rifle, pistol, ammunition and other combat gear when he drove to the Washington area on Jan. 5. He left the weapons in a Virginia hotel room but was armed with a pocketknife and wearing a neck gaiter and beanie hat to mask his appearance when he and other Oath Keepers entered the Capitol on Jan. 6, prosecutors said.

Oath Keepers members dressed in paramilitary clothing stormed the Capitol in “stack” formations. Others amassed firearms on the outskirts of Washington, D.C, and were prepared to bring the weapons into the city on Jan. 6 if Rhodes or his associates believed the need arose, according to prosecutors. In the end, the group’s “quick reaction force” teams didn’t bring guns into Washington.

Before he left the Capitol, Wilson joined a mob of people trying to push open the Rotunda Doors from inside the building, according to prosecutors.

Later that afternoon, according to a court filing, Wilson joined Rhodes and others in a hotel's private suite, where Rhodes called somebody over a speaker phone and repeatedly implored the person to tell Trump to "call upon groups like the Oath Keepers to forcibly oppose the transfer of power." The unidentified person on the phone refused to let Rhodes speak directly with Trump.

“After the call ended, Rhodes stated to the group, ‘I just want to fight,’” the filing says.

Several days after he returned home, Wilson tossed his cellphone into the Atlantic Ocean to keep its contents out of law enforcement’s hands, prosecutors said.

Wilson also pleaded guilty to a charge of obstructing an official proceeding, the joint session of Congress for certifying Biden's victory over former President Donald Trump.

Four other people connected with the Oath Keepers have pleaded guilty to obstruction of Congress and a lesser conspiracy charge. A conviction under the seditious conspiracy charge carries a maximum penalty of 20 years, compared with five years on the lesser conspiracy charge.

More than 780 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the Jan. 6 riot. Over 270 of them have pleaded guilty, mostly to misdemeanors. More than 160 of them have been sentenced.

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HEADLINE	05/04 Judge accepts Derek Chauvin plea deal
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/judge-overseeing-chauvin-civil-rights-case-accepts-plea-84495693
GIST	<p>ST. PAUL, Minn. -- The judge overseeing the federal civil rights cases of four former Minneapolis police officers in the killing of George Floyd said Wednesday that he has accepted the terms of Derek Chauvin's plea agreement and will sentence him to 20 to 25 years in prison.</p> <p>Chauvin pleaded guilty Dec. 15 to violating Floyd’s civil rights, admitting for the first time that he kept his knee on Floyd’s neck — even after he became unresponsive — resulting in the Black man’s death on May 25, 2020. The white former officer admitted he willfully deprived Floyd of his right to be free from unreasonable seizure, including unreasonable force by a police officer.</p> <p>Under the plea agreement, which Chauvin signed, both sides agreed Chauvin should face a sentence ranging from 20 to 25 years, with prosecutors saying they would seek 25. He could have faced life in prison on the federal count. With credit for good time in the federal system, he would serve from 17 years to 21 years and three months behind bars.</p>

U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson deferred accepting the agreement pending the completion of a presentence investigation. He said in a one-page order Wednesday that the report had been issued, so it was now appropriate to accept the deal. He has not set a sentencing date for Chauvin.

Chauvin is already serving a 22 1/2 year sentence for his murder conviction in state court last year, though he is appealing that conviction. He would serve the federal sentence concurrently with the state sentence.

The federal plea deal means Chauvin will probably spend more time in prison than he faced under his state sentence. State prisoners in Minnesota typically serve one-third of their sentence on parole, which for him would mean 15 years in prison.

Chauvin waived his right to contest his federal conviction if Magnuson accepted the plea agreement.

Magnuson also has not set sentencing dates for three other ex-officers who were convicted of related federal civil rights charges in February. The presentence investigations for Tou Thao, Thomas Lane and J. Alexander Kueng are still underway. They're scheduled to go on trial next month in state court on charges of aiding and abetting Chauvin in Floyd's murder.

Prosecutors revealed at a pretrial hearing last month that the three had rejected plea agreements on the state charges. Terms were not disclosed. Lane's attorney, Earl Gray, said it was hard for the defense to negotiate when the three still didn't know what their federal sentences would be.

On Wednesday, Gray renewed his motions for a change of venue, and for postponing the trial until after the federal sentencings, or even until next year. He wrote that it's "abundantly clear" from questionnaires returned by prospective jurors that a fair and impartial jury for the trial can never be seated in Hennepin County, which includes Minneapolis, because of the "public hatred" of the defendants.

"It is clear that the vast majority of the Hennepin County community has a deep and bitter prejudice against police officer defendants and this case," Gray wrote.

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